

ACME

March No. 26

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M A G A Z I N E O F
HORROR

THE BIZARRE, THE FRIGHTENING, THE GRUESOME



Jules de Grandin in
**THE DEVIL'S
BRIDE**

by SEABURY QUINN

**CLIFFS THAT
LAUGHED**

by R. A. LAFFERTY

**THE WHITE
DOG**

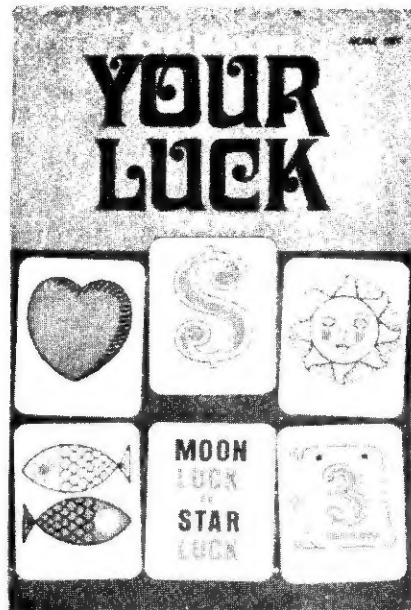
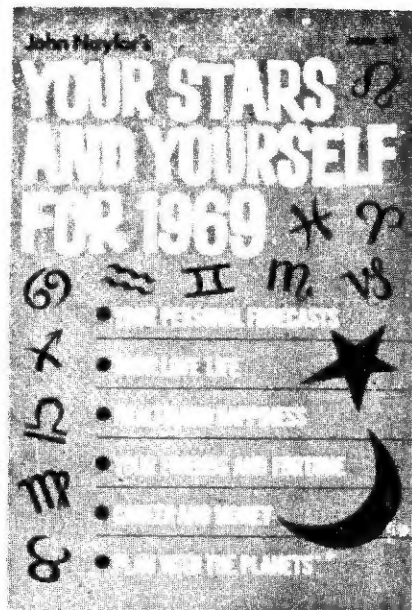
by FEODOR SOLOGUB

FLIGHT

by JAMES W. BENNETT
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M A G A Z I N E O F HORROR

THE BIZARRE, THE FRIGHTENING, THE GRUESOME

Volume 5

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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The Editor's Page

If you had been reading AMAZING STORIES monthly and quarterly, and WEIRD TALES in 1928, and added SCIENCE WONDER STORIES and AIR WONDER STORIES to your list when they appeared in the newsstands in 1929, then you would have thought you knew what to expect when you picked up the October 1929 issue of WEIRD TALES and saw the title, *The Battle of the Toads*, by David H. Keller on the contents page. And you would have been astonished; for here readers saw a different sort of story, written in a different manner from such powerful tales as *The Revolt of the Pedestrians*, *The Menace*, and *The Human Termites* (still running in SCIENCE WONDER STORIES at that moment). There is a touch of grue, to be sure; but the manner is light, almost whimsical. And the following two issues brought *The Tailed Man of Cornwall* and *No Other Man*, so that there was no doubt that we had a series here.

But only one more "Cornwall" story appeared in WEIRD TALES: *The Bride Well*, in the October 1930 issue; eight years later, *The Thirty And One*, was published in the November 1938 issue of MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES; three years after that, *The Key to Cornwall* appeared in the February 1941 issue of STIRRING SCIENCE STORIES. And that apparently was all we would see.

For some time, readers have been urging me to see if I could obtain

the rights to reprint this series; and Sam Moskowitz and others told me that there were a number of unpublished tales in the series. That turned out to be an understatement: what we have is a full book-length collection of stories, each complete in itself, but running chronologically. The title of the book is *Tales From Cornwall, A History of the Hube-laires*.

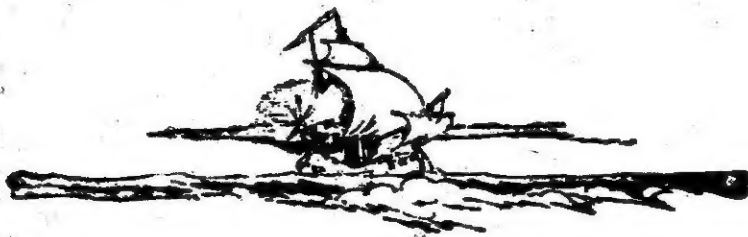
These are *tales*, rich in legend and folklore, rather than tightly plotted stories, although some of them certainly have plots in the commercial fiction sense. There is, as I mentioned above, a touch of the gruesome in them, but after a few we find a light, whimsical touch—never the heavy-handed sort of slapstick which burlesques the medium itself. A child can listen to them or read them with the same sort of open-mouthed wonder that a child finds in the famous fairy tales, while an adult can enjoy them and see something more. And I suppose, if you really insist upon doing so, you can apply various elements of various psychopathic theories to them too; in some quarters, this constitutes the acme of literary sophistication. (Of course, where such procedures actually help you to understand yourself and your fellow human beings better, this is all to the good; I do not either decry or demean such exploration with that purpose—but I don't think the activity has anything to do with the sort of enrichment one can receive from enjoying a story simply for what it is on its literary surface.)

Fairy tales have been under assault for some time, but I am

reminded of some comments that the late C.S. Lewis made in relation to them and to their supposed morbid effect upon tiny tots, their alleged damage to the child's capacity for relating to "reality". He notes that he himself enjoyed such stories thoroughly as a child, but never found that they distorted his perceptions or understanding of the "real" world. What he did find damaging was the so-called "proper" stories about "real life and real people" told to children, for these gave positively false pictures of the world in which we actually live, among people as they actually are. In other words, enjoying fairy stories did not result in his encountering any nasty shocks later in life, but believing what adults told him in stories "proper for children" resulted in many nasty shocks when he learned the truth. And looking back on it from my own personal experience, I find that what was upsetting to me about Grimm, etc., was not the stories themselves, but the fearful attitude of adults who were sure that I would be greatly harmed by such stories, and their

anxiety-ridden attempts to assure themselves that I had not been totally led astray; while finding out, as I grew older, that I had been systematically lied to by teachers, both so-called religious and secular, about the world as I actually would encounter it, was traumatic. So much then for the case against fairy tales.

The first story in Dr. Keller's series, *The Oak Tree*, is dated 200 B.C., when Folkes-King Eric rules in Wearfold, Norway, and Olaf is Lord of the House of the Wolves at Jutland. The family name will not be changed to "Hubelaire" until 57 B.C. With each story, we will present a section of the "argument with dates" relating to preceding tales. And we shall find, in this presentation that Dr. Keller prepared before he died, that the six previously published tales did not appear in chronological order. However, I shan't say any more here, for if you have read any of them before, that would infringe upon your pleasure of finding them in the proper place. RAWL



The Devil's Bride

by Seabury Quinn

(author of *Master Nicholas*, *The Cloth of Madness*, etc.)

1. "Alice, Where Are You?"

FIVE OF US SAT ON THE TWIN DIVANS flanking the fireplace where the eucalyptus logs burned brightly on their polished-brass andirons, throwing kaleidoscopic patterns of highlights and shadows on the ivory-enameled woodwork and rug-strewn floor of the "Ancestors' Room" at Twelvetreets.

Old David Hume, who dug Twelvetreets' foundations three centuries ago, had planned that room as shrine and temple to his *lar familiares*, and to it each succeeding generation of the house had added some memento of itself. The wide bay window at the east was fashioned from the carved poop of a Spanish galleon captured by a buccaneering member of the family and brought home to the quiet Jersey village where he rested while he planned new forays on the Antilles. The tiles about the fireplace, which told the story of the fall of man in blue-and-white Dutch delft, were a record of successful trading by another long-dead Hume who flourished in the days when Nieuw Amsterdam claimed

Devil Worship, The Black Mass, Cults of Evil—none of these things are inventions of the 20th Century and all have been the basis of both fact and fiction for millennia. The Devil, as Malek Taos (also known as Melek Taos, Malik Tawus, etc.) is of Moslem and Persian, rather than Christian descent, the main difference being that the Christian "Satan" is regarded as an adversary to God, a bad angel, but no closer to being God's equal than a bad man; while the Devil worshipped by the Yezidees is all-powerful, equal to the Good God. You'll find worshippers and followers of both Devils in this novel, which has not lost its impact in the years following 1932 for all the fact that we have seen what seem to be worse things, if for no other reason than that they were on a larger scale and not vulnerable to the sole efforts of Jules de Grandin and his friends and allies. There actually was an occult group in the 20s and 30s whose creed was "Do what thou wilt, this shall be the law", and whose practices were somewhat less than couth. Whether they went quite so far as the organization in SEABURY QUINN's most highly praised tale of Jules de Grandin is a moot point.

all the land between the Hudson and the Delaware, and held it from the Swedes till Britain with her lust for empire took it for herself and from it shaped the none too loyal colony of New Jersey. The carpets on the floor, the books and bric-a-brac on the shelves, each object of *vertu* within the glass-doored cabinets, had something to relate of Hume adventures on sea or land whether as pirates, patriots, traders or explorers, sworn enemies of law or duly constituted bailiffs of authority.

Adventure ran like ichor in the Hume veins, from David, founder of the family, who came none knew whence with his strange, dark bride and settled on the rising ground beside the Jersey meadows, to Ronald, last male of the line, who went down to flames and glory when his plane was cut out from its squadron and fell blazing like a meteor to the shell-scarred earth at Neuve Chapelle. His *croix de guerre*, posthumously awarded, lay in the cabinet beside the sword the Continental Congress had presented to his great-great-grandsire in lieu of long arrearage of salary.

Across the fire from us, between her mother and her fiance, sat Alice, final remnant of the line, her half-humorous, half-troubled glance straying to each of us in turn as she finished speaking. She was a slender wisp of girlhood, with a mass of chestnut hair with deep, shadow-laden waves which clustered in curling tendrils at the nape of her neck, a pale, clear complexion, the ivory tones of which were

enhanced by the crimson of her wide, sensitive mouth and the long, silken lashes and purple depths of the slightly slanting eyes which gave her face a piquant, oriental flavor.

"You say the message is repeated constantly, *Mademoiselle*?" asked Jules de Grandin, my diminutive French friend, as he cast a fleeting look of unqualified approval at the slim satin slipper and silk-sheathed leg the girl displayed as she sat with one foot doubled under her.

"Yes, it's most provoking when you're trying to get some inkling of the future, especially at such a time as this, to have the silly thing keep saying—"

"Alice, dear," Mrs. Hume remonstrated, "I wish you wouldn't trifle with such silly nonsense, particularly now, when—" She broke off with what would unquestionably have been a sniff in anyone less certainly patrician than Arabella Hume, and glanced reprovingly at her daughter.

De Grandin tweaked the needle-pointed tips of his little blond mustache and grinned the gamin grin which endeared him to dowager and debutante alike. "It is mysterious, as you have said, *Mademoiselle*," he agreed, "but are you sure you did not guide the board—"

"Of course I am," the girl broke in. "Just wait; I'll show you." Placing her coffee cup upon the Indian mahogany tabouret, she leaped petulantly from the couch and hurried from the room, returning in a moment with a ouija board and table.

"Now watch," she ordered, putting the contrivance on the couch beside her. "John, you and Doctor Trowbridge and Doctor de Grandin put your hands on the table, and I'll put mine between them, so you can feel the slightest tightening of my muscles. That way you'll be sure I'm not guiding the thing, even unintentionally. Ready?"

Feeling decidedly sheepish, I rose and joined them, resting my finger tips on the little three-legged table. Young Davisson's hand was next mine, de Grandin's next to his, and between all rested Alice's slender, cream-white fingers. Mrs. Hume viewed the spectacle with silent disapproval.

For a moment we bowed above the ouija board, waiting tensely for some motion of the table. Gradually a feeling of numbness crept through my hands and wrists as I held them in the strained and unfamiliar pose. Then, with a sharp and jerky start the table moved, first right, then left, then in an ever-widening circle till it swung sharply toward the upper left-hand corner of the board, pausing momentarily at the A, then traveling swiftly to the L, thence with constant acceleration back

to I. Quickly the message was spelled out; a pause, and then once more the three-word sentence was repeated:

ALICE COME HOME

"There!" the girl exclaimed, a catch, half fright, half annoyance, in her voice. "It spelled those very words three times today. I couldn't get it to say anything else!"

"Rot. All silly nonsense," John Davisson declared, lifting his hands from the table and gazing almost, resentfully at his charming fiancée. "You may believe you didn't move the thing, dear, but you must have, for—"

"Doctor de Grandin, Doctor Trowbridge," the girl appealed, "you held my hands just now. You'd have known if I'd made even the slightest move to guide the table, wouldn't you?" We nodded silent agreement, and she hurried on:

"That's just what's puzzling me. Why should a girl who's going to be married tomorrow be telling herself, subconsciously or otherwise, to 'come home'? If the board had spelt 'Go home,' perhaps it would have made sense, for we're going to our own place when we come back from our wedding trip; but why the constant repetition of 'Come home,' I'd like to know. Do you suppose—"

The rancous hooting of an automobile horn broke through her question and a moment later half a dozen girls accompanied by as many youths stormed into the big hall.

"Ready, old fruit?" called Irma Sherwood, who was to be the maid of honor. "We'd better be stepping on the gas; the church is all lit up and Doctor Cuthbert's got the organ all tuned and humming." She threw a dazzling smile at us and added, "This business of getting Alice decently married is more trouble than running a man down for myself, Doctor Trowbridge. One more rehearsal of these nuptials and I'll be a candidate for a sanitarium."

St. Chrysostom's was all alight when we arrived at the pentice and paused beside the baptismal font awaiting the remainder of the bridal party; for, as it ever is with lovers, John and Alice had lagged behind the rest to exchange a few banalities of the kind relished only by idiots, little children and those engaged to wed:

"Sorry to delay the show, friends and fellow citizens," Alice apologized as she leaped from Davisson's roadster and tossed her raccoon

coat aside. "The fact is, John and I had something of importance to discuss, and"—she raised both hands to readjust her hat—"and so we lingered by the way to—"

"Alice!" Mrs. Hume's voice betokened shocked propriety and hopeless protest at the antics of her daughter's graceless generation. "You're *surely* not going to wear that—that thing in church?" Her indignant glance indicated the object of her wrath. "Why, it's hardly decent," she continued, then paused as though vocabulary failed her while she pointed mutely to the silver girdle which was clasped about her daughter's slender waist.

"Of course, I shall, old dear," the girl replied. "The last time one of us was married she wore it, and the one before wore it, too. Hume women always wear this girdle when they're married. It brings 'em luck and insures big fam—"

"*Alice!*" the sharp, exasperated interruption cut her short. "If you have to be indelicate, at least you might remember where we are."

"All right, Mater, have it your own way, but the girdle gets worn, just the same," the girl retorted, pirouetting slowly, so that the wide belt's polished bosses caught flashes from the chandelier and flung them back in gleaming, lance-like rays.

"*Mon Dieu, Mademoiselle*, what is it that you wear? May I see it, may I examine it?" de Grandin demanded excitedly, bending forward to obtain a closer view of the shining corselet.

"Of course," the girl replied. "Just a moment, till I get it off." She fumbled at a fastening in front, undid a latch of some sort and put the gleaming girdle in his hand.

It was a beautiful example of barbaric jewelry, a belt, perhaps a corset would be the better term, composed of two curved plates of hammered silver so formed as to encircle the wearer's abdomen from front to hips, joined together at the back by a wide band of flexible brown leather of exquisitely soft texture. In front the stomach-plates were locked together by four rings with a long silver pin which went through them like a loose rivet, with a little ball at the top fastened by a chain of cold-forged silver links. The metal was heavily bossed and rather crudely set with a number of big red and yellow stones. From each plate depended seven silver chains, each terminating in a heart-shaped ornament carved from the same kind of stones with which the belt was jeweled, and these clanked and jingled musically as the little Frenchman held the thing up to the light and gazed at it with a look of mingled fascination

and repulsion. "*Grand Dieu!*" he exclaimed softly. "It is! I can not be mistaken; it is assuredly one of them, but--"

Alice bent smilingly across his shoulder. "Nobody knows quite what it is or where it comes from," she explained, "but there's a tradition in the family that David Hume's mysterious bride brought it with her as a part of her marriage portion. For years every daughter of the house wore it to be married, and it's been known as 'the luck of the Humes' for goodness knows how long. The legend is that the girl who wears it will keep her beauty and her husband's love and have an easy time in child--"

"Alice!" Once more her mother intervened.

"All right, Mother, I won't say it," her daughter laughed, "but even nice girls know you don't find babies in a cabbagehead nowadays." Then, to de Grandin:

"I'm the first Hume girl in three generations, and the last of the family in the bargain; so I'm going to wear the thing for whatever luck there is in it, no matter what anybody says."

The answering smile de Grandin gave her was rather forced. "You do not know whence it comes, nor what its history is?" he asked.

"No, we don't," Mrs. Hume returned, before her daughter could reply, "and I'm heartily sorry Alice found the thing. I almost wish I'd sold it when I had the chance."

"Eh?" he turned upon her almost sharply. "How is that, *Madame*?"

"A foreign gentleman called the other day and said he understood we had this thing among our curios and that it might be for sale. He was very polite, but quite insistent that I let him see it. When I told him it was not for sale he seemed greatly disappointed and begged me to reconsider. He even offered to allow me to set whatever price I cared to, and assured me there would be no quibble over it, even though we asked a hundred times the belt's intrinsic worth. I fancy he was an agent with *carte blanche* from some wealthy collector, he seemed so utterly indifferent where money was concerned."

"And did he, by any chance, inform you what this belt may be, or whence it came?" de Grandin queried.

"Why, no; he merely described it, and begged to be allowed to see it. One hardly likes to ask such questions from a chance visitor, you know."

"*Precisement*. One understands, *Madame*," he nodded.

The procession was quickly marshaled, and attended by her maids, Alice marched serenely up the aisle. As she had no male relative to do



the office, the duty of giving her in marriage was delegated to me, both she and her mother declaring that no one more deserved the honor than the one who had assisted her into the world and brought her through the measles, chickenpox and whooping cough.

"And we'll have Trowbridge somewhere in the first one's name, old dear," Alice promised in a whisper as she patted my arm while we halted momentarily at the chancel steps.

"Now, when Doctor Bentley has pronounced the warning 'if no one offers an impediment to the marriage,'" the curate who was acting as master of ceremonies informed us, "you will proceed to the communion rail and—"



Somewhere outside, faint and faraway-seeming, but gaining quickly in intensity, there came a high, thin, whistling sound, piercing, but so high one could scarcely hear it. Rather, it seemed more like a screaming heard inside the head than any outward sound, and strangely, it seemed to circle round the three of us—the bride, the bridegroom and me—and to cut us definitely off from the remainder of the party.

"Queer," I thought. "There was no wind a moment ago, yet—" The thin, high whining closed tighter round us, and involuntarily I put my hands to my ears to shut out the intolerable sharpness of it, when with a sudden crash the painted window just above the altar burst as though a missile struck it, and through the ragged aperture came drifting a billowing yellow haze—a cloud of saffron dust, it seemed to me—which

hovered momentarily above the unveiled cross upon the altar, then dissipated slowly, like steam evaporating in winter air.

I felt an odd sensation, almost like a heavy blow delivered to my chest, as I watched the yellow mist disintegrate, then straightened with a start as another sound broke on my hearing.

"Alice! Alice, where are you?" the bridegroom called, and through the bridal party ran a wondering murmur:

"Where's Alice? She was right there a moment ago! Where *is* she? Where's she gone?"

I blinked my eyes and shook my head. It was so. Where the bride had stood, her fingers resting lightly on my arm, a moment before, there was only empty space.

Wonderingly at first, then eagerly, at last with a frenzy bordering on madness, we searched for her. Nowhere, either in the church or vestry room or parish house, was sign or token of the missing bride, nor could we find a trace of her outside the building. Her coat and motor gloves lay in a crumpled heap within the vestibule; the car in which she came to the church still stood beside the curb; an officer whose beat had led him past the door two minutes earlier declared he had seen no one leave the edifice—had seen no one on the block, for that matter. Yet, discuss and argue as we might, search, seek and call, then tell ourselves it was no more than a silly girl's prank, the fact remained: Alice Hume was gone—vanished as utterly as though absorbed in air or swallowed by the earth, and all within less time than the swiftest runner could have crossed the chancel, much less have left the church beneath the gaze of half a score of interested people for whom she was the center of attraction.

"She must have gone home," someone suggested as we paused a moment in our search and gazed into each other's wondering eyes. "Of course, that's it! She's gone back to Twelvetees!" the others chorused, and by the very warmth of their agreement gave tokens of dissent.

At last the lights were dimmed, the church deserted, and the bridal party, murmuring like frightened children to each other, took up their way toward Twelvetees, to which, we were agreed, the missing bride had fled.

But as we started on our way, young Davisson, with lover's precense of evil to his loved one, gave tongue to the question which trembled silently on every lip. "Alice!" he cried out to the unresponsive night, and the tremor in his voice was eloquent of his heart's agony, "Alice, beloved—*where are you?*"

2. *Bulala-Gwai*

"COMING?" I ASKED AS THE sorrowful little motorcade began its pilgrimage to Twelvetreets.

De Grandin shook his head in short negation. "Let them go on," he ordered. "Later, when they have left, we may search the house for Made-moiselle Alice, though I greatly doubt we shall find her. Meanwhile, there is that here which I would investigate. We can work more efficiently when there are no well-meaning nincompoops to harass us with senseless questions. Come." He turned on his heel and led the way back into the church.

"Tell me, Friend Trowbridge," he began as we walked up the aisle, "when that window yonder broke, did you see, or seem to see, a cloud of yellowness drift through the opening?"

"Why, yes, I thought so," I replied. "It looked to me like a puff of muddy fog— smoke, perhaps— but it vanished so quickly that—"

"*Tres bien*," he nodded. "That is what I wished to know. None of the other's mentioned seeing it and our eyes play strange tricks on us at times. I thought perhaps I might have been mistaken, but your testimony is enough for me."

With a murmuring of excuse, as though apologizing for the sacrilege, he moved the bishop's chair to a point beside the altar, mounted nimbly on its tall, carved back, and examined the stone casing of the broken window intently. From my station outside the communion rail I could hear him swearing softly and excitedly in mingled French and English as he drew a card from his pocket, scraped something from the window-sill upon the card, then carefully descended from his lofty perch.

"Behold, regard, attend me, if you will, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered. "Observe what I have found." As he extended the card toward me I saw a line of light, yellow powder, like pollen from a flower, gathered along one edge.

"*Regardez!*" he commanded sharply, raising the slip of pasteboard level with my face. "Now, if you please, what did I do?"

"Eh?" I asked, puzzled.

"Your hearing functions normally. What is it that I did?"

"Why, you showed me that card, and—"

"Precisely. And—?" He paused with interrogatively arched brows.

"And that's all."

"*Non*. Not at all. By no means, my friend," he denied. "Attend me: First I did, as you have said, present the card to you. Next, when it was fairly level with your nostrils, I did blow on it, oh so gently, so

that some of the powder on it was inhaled by you. Next I raised my arms three times above my head, lowered them again, then capered round you like a dancing Indian. Finally, I did tweak you sharply by the nose."

"Tweak me by the nose!" I echoed aghast. "You're crazy!"

"Like the fox, as your slang so drolly expresses it," he returned with a nod. "My friend, it has been exactly one minute and forty seconds by my watch since you did inhale that so tiny bit of dust, and during all that time you were as utterly oblivious to all that happened as though you had been under ether. Yes. When first I saw I suspected. Now I have submitted it to the test and am positive it is so."

"What on earth are you talking about?" I asked.

"*Bulala-gwai*, no less."

"Bu—what?"

He seated himself in the bishop's chair, crossed his knees and regarded me with the fixed, unwinking stare which always reminded me of an earnest tom-cat. "Attend me," he commanded. "My duties as an army medical officer and as a member of *la Surete*, have taken me to many places off the customary map of tourists. The Congo Francais, by example. It was there that I first met *bulala-gwai*, which was called by our gendarmes the snuff of death, sometimes *la petite mort*, or little death.

"*Barbe d'un rat vert*, but it is well named, my friend! A traveler journeying through the interior once lay down to rest on his camp bed within his tent. He meant to sleep for thirty minutes only. When he awoke he found that twenty-six hours had gone—likewise all his paraphernalia. Native robbers had inserted a tube beneath his tent flap, blown a minute pinch of their death snuff into the enclosure, then boldly entered and helped themselves to all of his effects. Again, a tiny paper torpedo of the stuff was thrown through the window of a locomotive cab while it stood on a siding. Both engineer and fireman were rendered unconscious and ten hours, during which time the natives denuded the machine of every movable part. So powerful an anesthetic is *bulala-gwai* that so much of it as can be gotten on a penknife's point, if blown into a room fourteen feet square will serve to paralyze every living thing within the place for several minutes.

"The secret of its formula is close-guarded, but I have been assured by witch-men of the Congo that it can be made in two strengths, one to kill at once, the other to stupefy, and it is a fact to which I can testify

that it is sometimes used successfully to capture both elephants and lions alive.

"I once went with the local inspector of police to examine premises which had been burglarized with the aid of this so powerful sleeping-powder, and on the window-sill we did behold a minute quantity of it. The inspector scooped it up on a card and called a native gendarme to him, then blew it in the negro's face. The stuff had lost much potency by exposure to the air, but still it was so powerful that the black was totally unconscious for upward of five minutes, and did not move a muscle when the inspector struck him a stinging blow on the cheek and even touched a lighted cigarette against his hand. Not only that, when finally he awakened he did not realize he had been asleep at all, and would not believe us till we showed him the blister where the cigarette had burned him.

"Very good. It is twenty years and more since I beheld this powder from the Devil's snuff-box, but when I saw that yellow cloud come floating through the broken window, and when I realized Mademoiselle Alice had decamped unseen by us before our very eyes, I said to me, 'Jules de Grandin, here, it seems, is evidence of *bulala-gwai*, and nothing else.'

"'You may be right, Jules de Grandin,' I answered me, 'but still you are not sure. Wait until the others have departed with their silly gabble-gabble, then ask Friend Trowbridge if he also saw the yellow cloud. He knows nothing of *bulala-gwai*, but if he saw that fog of yellowness, you may depend upon it there was such a thing.'

"And so I waited, and when you did agree with me, I searched, and having searched I found that which I sought and—forgive me, good friends!—as there was no other laboratory material at hand, I did test the stuff on you, and now I am convinced. Yes, I damn know how they spirited Mademoiselle Alice away while our eyes were open and unseeing. Who it was that stole her, and why he did it—that is for us to discover as quickly as may be."

He felt for his cigarette case and thoughtfully extracted a "Maryland," then, remembering where he was, replaced it. "Let us go," he ordered. "Perhaps the chattering has become tired of useless searching at Twelvetreets, and we can get some information from Madame Hume."

"But if this *bulala*—this sleeping-powder, whatever its native name is—was used here, it's hardly likely Alice has gone back to Twelvetreets, is it?" I objected. "And what possible information can Mrs. Hume give? She knows as little about it all as you or I."

"One wonders," he replied, as we left the church and climbed into my

car. "At any rate, perhaps she can tell us more of that *sacré* girdle which Mademoiselle Alice wore."

"I noticed you seemed surprized when you saw it," I returned. "Did you recognize it?"

"Perhaps," he answered cautiously. "At least, I have seen others not unlike it."

Indeed? Where?"

"In Kurdistan. It is a Yezidee bridal belt, or something very like it."

"A what?"

"A girdle worn by virgins who—but I forget, you do not know."

"The work of pacifying subject people is one requiring all the white man's ingenuity, my friend, as your countrymen who have seen service in the Philippines will tell you. In 1922 when French authority was flouted in Arabia, I was dispatched there on a secret mission. Eventually my work took me to Deir-er-Zor, Anah, finally to Bagdad and across British Irak to the Kurdish border. There—no matter in what guise—I penetrated Mount Lalesh and the holy city of the Yezidees.

"These Yezidees are a mysterious sect scattered throughout the Orient from Manchuria to the Near East, but strongest in North Arabia, and feared and loathed alike by Christian, Jew, Buddhist, Taoist and Moslem, for they are worshippers of Satan.

"Their sacred mountain, Lalesh, stands north of Bagdad on the Kurdish border near Mosul, and on it is their holy and forbidden city which no stranger is allowed to enter, and there they have a temple, reared on terraces hewn from the living rock, in which they pay homage to the image of a serpent as the beguiler of man from pristine innocence. Beneath the temple are gloomy caverns, and there, at dead of night, they perform strange and bloody rites before an idol fashioned like a peacock, whom they call Malek Taos, the viceroy of Shaitan—the Devil—upon earth.

"According to the dictates of the *Khitab Asward*, or Black Scripture, their Mir, or pope, has brought to him as often as he may desire the fairest daughters of the sect, and these are his to do with as he chooses. When the young virgin is prepared for the sacrifice she dons a silver girdle, like the one we saw on Mademoiselle Alice tonight. I saw one on Mount Lalesh. Its front is hammered silver, set with semi-precious stones of red and yellow—never blue, for blue is heaven's color, and therefore is accursed among the Yezidees who worship the Arch-Demon. The belt's back is of leather, sometimes from the skin of a lamb untimely taken from its mother, sometimes of a kid's skin, but in exceptional cases, where

the woman to be offered is of noble birth and notable lineage, it is made of tanned and carefully prepared human skin—a murdered babe's by preference. Such was the leather of Mademoiselle Alice's girdle. I recognized it instantly. When one has examined a human hide tanned into leather he can not forget its feel and texture, my friend."

"But this is dreadful—unthinkable!" I protested. "Why should Alice wear a girdle made of human skin?"

"That is precisely what we have to ascertain tonight, if possible," he told me. "I do not say Madame Hume can give us any direct information, but she may perchance let drop some hint that will set us on the proper track. No," he added as he saw protest forming on my lips, "I do not intimate she has wilfully withheld anything she knows. But in cases such as this there are no such things as trifles. Some bit of knowledge which she thinks of no importance may easily prove the key to this so irritating mystery. One can but hope."

Another car, a little roadster of modish lines, opulent with gleaming chromium, drew abreast of us as we halted at the gateway of the Hume house. Its driver was a woman, elegantly dressed, sophisticated, *chic* from the crown of her tightly fitting black felt hat to the tips of her black leather gloves. As she slackened speed and leaned toward us, our headlights' rays struck her face, illuminating it as an actor's features are picked out by the spotlight on a darkened stage. Although a black lace veil was drawn across her chin and cheeks after the manner of a Western desperado's handkerchief mask, so filmy was the tissue that her countenance was alluringly shadowed rather than obscured. A beautiful face it was, but not a lovely one. Skin light and clear as any blond's was complemented by hair as black and bright as polished basalt, black brows circumflexed superciliously over eyes of almost startling blueness. Her small, petulant mouth had full, ardent lips of brilliant red.

There was a slightly amused, faintly scornful smile on her somewhat vixenish mouth, and her small teeth, gleaming like white coral behind the vivid carmine of her lips, seemed sharp as little sabers as she called to us in a rich contralto: "Good evening, gentlemen. If you're looking for someone, you'll save time and trouble by abandoning the search and going home."

The echo of a cynical, disdainful laugh floated back to us as she set speed to her car and vanished in the dark.

Jules de Grandin stared after her, his hand still halfway to the hat he had politely touched when she first addressed us. Astonishingly, he burst

into a laugh. "*Tiens*, my friend," he exclaimed when he regained his breath, "it seems there are more locks than one for which we seek the keys tonight."

3. "*David Hume hys. Journal*"

ARABELLA HUME CAME QUICKLY toward us as we entered the hall. Sorrow and hope—or the entreaty of hope—was in the gaze she turned on us. Also, it seemed to me, there lay deep in her eyes some latent, nameless fear, vague and indefinable as a child's dread of the dark, and as terrifying.

"Oh, Doctor Trowbridge—Doctor de Grandin—have you found out anything? Do you know anything? Do you know anything?" she quavered. "It's all so dreadful, so—so impossible! Can you—have you any explanation?"

De Grandin bent stiffly from the hips as he took her hand in his and raised it to his lips. "Courage, *Madame*," he exhorted. "We shall find her, never fear."

"Oh, yes, yes," she answered almost breathlessly, "she will be found. She *must* be found, with you and Doctor Trowbridge looking for her, I know it. Don't you think a mother who has been as close to her child as I have been to Alice since Ronald was killed may have a sixth sense where is concerned? I have such a sense. I tell you—I *know*—Alice is near."

The little Frenchman regarded her somberly. "I, too, have a feeling she is not far distant," he declared. "It is as if she were near us—in an adjoining room, by example—but a room with sound-proof walls and a cleverly hidden door. It is for you to help us find that door—and the key which will unlock it—*Madame Hume*."

"I'll do everything I can," she promised.

"Very good. You can tell us, to begin, all that you know, all you have heard, of David Hume, the founder of this family."

Arabella gave him a half-startled, half-disbelieving glance, almost as though he had requested her to state her views of the Einstein hypothesis or some similarly recondite and irrelevant matter. "I really don't know anything about him," she returned somewhat coldly. "He seems to have been a sort of Melchizadek, appearing from nowhere and without any antecedents."

"U'm?" De Grandin stroked his little wheat-blond mustache with affectionate thoughtfulness. "There are then no records—no family records

of any kind—which one can consult? No deeds or wills or leases, by example?"

"Only the family Bible, and that—"

"*Eh bien, Madame*, we may do worse than consult the Scriptures in our present difficulty. By all means, lead us to it," he broke in.

The records of ten generations of Humes were spread upon the sheets bound between the Book of Malachi and the Apocrypha. Of succeeding members of the family there was extensive register; their births, their baptisms, their progeny and deaths, as well as matrimonial alliances being catalogued with painstaking detail. Of David Hume the only entry read: "*Dyed in ye hope of glorious Resurrection aet yrs 81, mos 7, dys 20, ye 29th Sept. MDCLVII.*"

"*Nom d'un bouc*, and is this all?" De Grandin tugged so viciously at the waxed ends of his mustache that I felt sure the hairs would be wrenched loose from his lip. "Satan bake the fellow for a pusillanimous rogue! Even though he had small pride of ancestry, he should have considered future generations. He should have had a thought for my convenience, *pardieu!*"

He closed the great, cedar-bound book with a resounding bang and thrust it angrily back into the case. But as he shoved the heavy volume from him a hammered brass corner reinforcing the cover caught against the shelf edge, wrenching the tome from his hands, and the Bible fell crashing to the floor.

"Oh, *mille pardons!*" he cried contritely, stooping to retrieve the fallen book. "I did lose my temper, *Madame*, and—*Dieu de Dieu*, what have we here?"

The impact of the fall had split the brittle, age-worn cedar slabs with which the Bible had been bound, and where the wood had buckled gablewise the glazed-leather inner binding had cracked in a long, vertical fissure, and from this opening protruded a sheaf of folded paper. Even as we leaned forward to inspect it we saw that it was covered with fine, crabbing writing in all but totally faded ink.

Bearing the manuscript to the reading-table de Grandin switched on all the lights in the electrolier and bent above the faded, time-obliterated sheets. For a moment he knit his brows in concentration; then:

"Ah-ha," he exclaimed exultantly, "ah-ha-ha, my friends; we have at last flushed old Monsieur David's secret from its covert! Come close and look, if you will be so good."

He spread the sheets upon the polished tabletop and tapped the upper-

most with the tip of a small, well-manicured forefinger. "You see?" he asked.

Although the passage of three hundred years had dimmed the ink with which the old scribe wrote, enough remained to let us read across the yellowed paper's top: "*David Hume hys Journal*" and below: "*Inscribed at hys house at Twelvetrees in ye colonie of New—*"

The rest had faded out, but enough was there to tell us that some secret archive of the family had been brought to light and that the scrivener had been that mysterious ancestor of whom no more was known than that he once had lived at Twelvetrees.

"May one trespass on your hospitality for pen and paper, *Madame*?" de Grandin asked, his little, round blue eyes shining with suppressed excitement, the twin, needles of his waxed mustache points twitching like the whiskers of an agitated tom-cat. "This writing is so faint it would greatly tax one to attempt reading it aloud, and by tomorrow it may be fainter with exposure to the air; but if you will give leave that I transcribe it while I yet may read, I will endeavor to prepare a copy and read you the results of my work when it is done."

Arabella Hume, scarcely less excited than we, nodded hasty assent, and de Grandin shut himself in the Ancestors' Room with pen and paper and a tray of cigarettes to perform his task.

Twice while we waited in the hall we saw the butler tiptoe into the closed room in answer to the little Frenchman's summons. His first trip was accompanied by a bowl of ice, a glass and a decanter of brandy. "He'll drink himself into a stupor," Arabella told me when the second consignment of liquor was borne in.

"Not he," I assured her with a laugh. "Alcohol's only a febrifuge with him. He drinks it like water when he's working intensively, and it never seems to affect him."

"Oh?" she answered somewhat doubtfully. "Well, I hope he'll manage to stay sober till he's finished."

"Wait and see," I told her. "If he's unsteady on his feet, I'll—"

De Grandin's entrance cut my promise short. His face was flushed, his little, round blue eyes were shining as though with unshed tears, and his mustache fairly bristling with excitement and elation; but of alcoholic intoxication there was no slightest sign.

"*Voyez*," he ordered, flourishing a sheaf of rustling papers. "Although the writing was so faded that I did perforce miss much of the story of Monsieur the Old One, enough remained to give us information of the great importance. But yes. Your closest attention, if you please."

Seating himself on the table edge and swinging one small, patent leather shod foot in rhythm with his reading, he began:

" . . . and now my case was truly worser than before, for though my Moslem captors had been followers of Mahound, these that had taken me from them were worshippers of Satan's self, and nightly bowed the knee to Beelzebub, whom they worshipped in the image of a peacock highte Melek Taos, whose favor they are wont to invoke with every sort of wickedness. For their black scriptures teach that God is good and merciful, and slow to take offense, while Shaitan, as they name the Devil, is ever near and ever watchful to do hurt to mankind, wherefore he must be propitiated by all who would not feel his malice. And so they work all manner of evil, accounting that as virtue which would be deemed most villainous by us, and confessing and repenting of good acts as though they were the deadliest of sins.

"Their chief priest is yclept the Mir, and of all their wicked tribe he is the wickedest, scrupling not at murder and finding great delight in such vile acts as caused the Lord aforesometimes to rain down fire and brimstone on the evil cities of the plain.

"Once as I stood without their temple gate by night I did espy a great procession entering with the light of torches and with every sound of minstrels and mirth, but in the middle of the revelers there walked a group of maidens, and these did weep continually. And when I asked the meaning of this sight they told me that these girls, the very flower of the tribe, had been selected by the Mir for his delight and for the lust and cruelty of those who acted as his counsellors, for such is their religion that the pontifex may choose from out their womanhood as many as he pleases, and do unto them even according to the dictates of his evil will, nor may any say him nay. And as I looked upon these woeful women I beheld that each was clasped about the middle by a stomacher of cunningly wrought silver, and this, they told me, was the girdle of a bride, for their women don such girdles when they are ready to engage in wedlock, or when they tread the path of sorrow which leads them to the Mir and degradation. For he who gives his daughter voluntarily to be devoured by the Mir acquires merit in the eyes of Satan, and to lie as paramour to the Devil's viceroy on earth is accounted honorable for any woman, yea, even greater than to enter into matrimony."

The little Frenchman laid his paper down and turned his quick, bird-like glance upon us. "Is it not clear?" he asked. "This old Monsieur David was undoubtedly sold as slave unto the Yezidees by Moslems

who had in some way captured him. It is, of Sheik-Adi, the sacred city of the Satanists, he writes, and his reference to the silver girdles of the brides in most illuminating. *N'est-ce-pas?* Consider what he has to say a little later."

Shuffling through the pile of manuscript, he selected a fresh sheet and resumed:

"Yet she, who was the daughter of this man of blood and sin, was fair and good as any Christian maid. Moreover, her heart was inclined toward me, and many a kind act she did for me, the Christian slave, who sadly lacked for kindness in that evil mountain city. And so, as it has ever been 'twixt man and maid, we loved, and loving knew that we could not be happy till our fates were joined forever. And so it was arranged that we should fly to freedom in the south, where I could take her to wife, for she had agreed to renounce Satan and all his ways to follow in the pathway of the true religion.

"Now, in the falling of the year, when crops were gathered and the husbandry was through, these people were wont to gather in their temple of the peacock and make a feast wherewith they praised the power of evil, and on the altar would be offered beasts, birds and women devoted to the service of the arch-fiend. And thus did Kudejah and I arrange the manner of our flight:

"When all within the temple was prepared and we could hear the sound of drums and trumpets offering praise unto the Dèvil, we slipped quickly down the mountain pass, she closely veiled like any Moslem woman, I disguised as a man of Kurdistan, and with us were two mules well laden with gold and jewels of precious stones which she had filched from the treasury of the Mir her sire. Nor did we loiter on the way, but hastened ever till we came to the border of the land of evil and were safe among the Moslems, who treated us right kindly, believing us their co-religionists who were fleeing from the worshippers of Satan. And so we came at last to Busra, and thence by ship to Muskat, from whence we sailed again and finally came once more to England.

"But ere we breathed the English air again we had been wed with Christian rite; and Kudejah had dropped her heathen name and taken that of Mary, which had also been my mother's. And sure a sweeter bride or truer wife has no man ever had, e'en though she saw the light of day beneath the shadow of the Devil's temple. Yet, though she had accepted Christ and put behind her Lucifer and all his works, when we did stand before the parson to be wed my Mary wore about her the great silver belt which had been fashioned for her marriage when she dwelt

on Satan's mountain, and this we have unto this day as a marriage portion for the women of our house.

"Most crafty are those devil men from whom we fled, and well were we aware of it, and so we came to this new land, where I did leave my olden name behind and take the name of Hume, that those who might come seeking us might the better be befooled; and yet, though leagues of ocean toss between us and the worshippers of Satan, a thought still plagues us as a naughty dream may vex a frightened child. The office of high priest to Meleck Taos is hereditary in the family of the Mir. The eldest son ascends the altar to perform the rites of blood the moment that his sire has breathed his last, and if there be no son, then must the eldest daughter of the line be wedded unto Satan with formal ceremony and silver girdle, and serve as priestess in her father's stead until a son is born, whereupon she is led forth with all solemnity and put to death with horrid torment, for her sufferings are a libation unto Beelzebub. And thereupon a regency of under-priests must serve the King of Evil till the son is grown to man's estate.

"Wherefore, O ye who may come after me in this the family I have founded, I do adjure ye to make choice of death rather than submit unto the demands of the worshippers of Satan, for in the years to come it well may hap that the Mir his line may be exhausted, and then those crafty men of magic who do dwell on Mount Lalesh may seek ye out and summon ye to serve the altar of the Devil. And so I warn ye, if the time should come when ye receive a message from ye know not where, bidding ye simply to come home, that this shall be the sign, and straightway shall ye flee with utmost haste, or if ye can not flee, then take your life with your own hand, for better far is it to face an outraged God with the bloodstains of self-murder on your hands than to stand before the Seat of Judgment with your soul foredoomed for that ye were a priest and server of the Arch-Fiend in your days on earth.

"I have—"

"Well?" I prompted as the silence lengthened. "What else?"

"There is no 'else,' my friend," he answered. "As I told you, the ink with which *Monsieur l'Ancetre* wrote was faded as an old belle's charms; the remainder of his message is but the shadow of a shadow, an angel out of Paradise could not decipher it."

We sat in silence for a moment, and it was Arabella Hume who framed our common thought in words: "He said, 'if the time should come when ye receive a message from ye know not where, bidding ye simply to come home, this shall be the sign'—the message Alice got on the ouija board

today—you remember? You saw it repeated yourselves before we went to church!"

De Grandin bent a fixed, unwinking stare on her. "*Madame*," he asked, "can you not give us some description of the stranger who desired that you let him see the wedding girdle of Madame David? Was he, according to your guess, a Levantin?"

Mrs. Hume considered him a moment thoughtfully. Then: "No-o, I shouldn't think so," she replied. "He seemed more like a Spaniard, possibly Italian, though it's hard to say more than that he was dark and very clean-looking and spoke English with that perfect lack of accent which showed it was not his mother tongue. You know—each word sharply defined, as though it might be the result of a mental translation."

"Perfectly," de Grandin nodded. "I should say—"

"Well, I should say it's all a lot of nonsense," I broke in. "It may be true old David Hume was sold as a slave to these Devil-Worshippers; and that he ran off with the high priest's daughter—and all the money he could get his hands on. But you know how superstitious people were in those days. The chances are he was filled full of fantastic stories by the Yezidees, and believed everything he heard and more that he imagined. I'd say his conscience was troubling him toward the last; perhaps his mind was failing, too. Look how careful he hid what he'd written in the cover of the family Bible. Is that the action of a normal man, especially if he seriously intended future generations to profit by his warning?"

Arabella glanced at each of us in turn, finally gave vent to a sigh of relief and put her hand on mine. "Thank you, Samuel," she said. "I knew there was some explanation for it all; but Alice's strange disappearance and all this has so upset me that I'm hardly normal." To de Grandin she added:

"I'm sure Doctor Trowbridge's explanation is the right one. Old David must have been weak-minded when he wrote that senseless warning. He was eighty-one when he died, and you know how old people are inclined to imagine things. Like children, really."

A stubborn, argumentative expression crossed de Grandin's face, but gave place instantly to one of his quick, elfin grins. "Perhaps I have put too much trust in the vapors of a senile old man's broken mind," he admitted. "Nevertheless, the fact remains that Mademoiselle Alice is not here, and the task remains for us to find her. Come, Friend Trowbridge, there is little we can do here and much we can do elsewhere.

Let us go, if we have *Madame's* permission to retire." He bowed with Continental grace to Arabella.

"Oh, yes; and thank you so much for what you've done already," Mrs. Hume returned. "I'm half inclined to think this is some madcap prank of Alice's, but"—her expression of false confidence gave way a moment, unmasking the panic fear which gnawed at her heart—"if we hear nothing further by morning, I think we'd better summon the police, don't you?"

"By all means," he agreed, taking her hand in his and bending ceremoniously above it ere he turned to accompany me from the house.

"Thank you, my friend," he murmured as we began our homeward drive. "Your interruption was most timely and served to divert poor *Madame's* mind from the awful horror I saw gathering round us."

"Eh?" I returned. "You don't mean to tell me you actually believe that balderdash you read us?"

He turned on me in blank amazement. "And was your avowal of disbelief in Monsieur David's tale not simulated?" he asked.

"Good Lord," I answered in disgust, "d'yemean to say you swallowed that old dotard's story—all that nonsense about an hereditary priesthood of the Devil-Worshippers, and the possibility of—See here, don't you remember he said if the Mir's male line became extinct the eldest daughter had to serve, and that she must be married to the Devil? That might be possible—mystically speaking—but he specifically said she shall thereafter act as high priestess until a son is born. I know the legend of Robert the Devil, and it was probably implicitly believed in David Hume's day, for the Devil was a very real person then, but we've rather graduated from that sort of mediaevalism nowadays. How can a woman be married to the Devil, and bear him a son?"

There was more of sneer than smile in the mirthless grin he turned on me. "Have you been to India?" he demanded.

"India? Of course not, but what's that got to do with—"

"Then perhaps it is that you do not know of the *deva-dasis*, or wives of Siva. In that benighted land a father thinks he does acquire merit by giving up his daughter to be wedded to the god, and wedded to him she truly is, with all the formal pomp accompanying the espousal of a princess. Thereafter she is accounted honorable as consort of the great God of Destruction—but though her wedded lord is but a thing of carven stone she does not lack for offspring. No, *pardieu*, she is more often than not a mother before her thirteenth birthday, and several times a mother when her twentieth year is reached—if she survives that long.

"Consider the analogy here. From what I have beheld with my own two eyes—and my sight is very keen—and from what I have been told by witnesses who had no need to lie or even stretch the truth, I know that Monsieur David's narrative is based on fact, and very ugly fact, at that."

"But what about his hiding his 'warning' in the cover of the Bible?" I persisted. "Surely—"

"Three centuries have passed since he penned those words," de Grandin interrupted, "and in that time much may be forgotten. That David told his children where they might look for guidance if the need for guidance rose I make no doubt. But in the course of time his admonition was forgotten, or—"

He broke off musingly, and I had to prompt him: "Yes? Or—?"

"Or the story of some secret warning *has* been handed down to each generation," he replied. "Did not it strike you more than once that Madame Hume was not entirely honest—pardon, I should say frank with us? The fear of something which she could or would not mention was plainly in her eyes when we came from the church, and earlier in the evening her efforts to direct the conversation from that obscure message which her daughter had from the ouija board were far more resolute than they would have been had she had nothing but a distaste for superstitious practice to excuse them. Also, when we did ask for information relative to Monsieur David she suddenly turned cold to us, and had I not persisted would undoubtedly have turned us from examination of the family Bible. Moreover—"

Again he paused and again I prompted him.

"Jules de Grandin is experienced," he assured me solemnly. "As a member of *la Surete* he has had much to do with questioned documents. He knows ink, he knows paper, he can scent a forgery or an attempt at alteration as far as he can recognize the symptoms of coryza. Yes."

"Yes? What then?"

"Yes; what—"

"This, *cordieu!* I played the dolt, the simple, guileless fool, tonight, my friend, but this I saw with half an eye as I made transcription of old David's story: Someone—I know not who—*some one has essayed to blot that writing out with acid ink eradicator*. Had the writing been in modern metallic ink the effort would have been successful, but *Monsieur l'Ancetre* wrote with the old vegetable ink of his time, and so the acid did not quite efface it. It is that to which I owed my ability to read the journal. But believe me, good friend, it was a man—or woman—and not

time, which dimmed the writing on those pages and rendered illegible much which old David wrote to warn his descendants, and which would have greatly simplified our problems."

"But who could have done it—and why?" I asked.

He raised his narrow shoulders in an irritable shrug. "Ask the good God—or perhaps the Devil—as to that," I told me. "They know the answer; not I."

4. *By Whose Hand?*

THREATENING LITTLE FLURRIES OF SNOW had been skirmishing down from the cloud-veiled sky all evening; before we were halfway to my house the storm attacked in force, great feathery flakes following each other in smothering profusion, obscuring traffic lights, clinging to the windshield, clogging our wheels. Midnight was well past as we stamped up my front steps, brushed our feet on the doormat and paused a moment at the vestibule while I fumbled for my latch-key. As I swung back the door the office 'phone began a shrill, hysterical cachinnation which seemed to rise in terrified crescendo as I ran down the hall.

"Hullo?" I challenged gruffly.

"Doctor Trowbridge?" the high-pitched voice across the wire called.

"Yes; what—"

"This is Wilbur, sir. Mrs. Hume's butler, you know."

"Oh? Well, what's—"

"It's the missis, sir; she's—I'm afraid you'll be too late, sir; but please hurry. I just found her, an' she's—" His voice trailed off in a wheeze of asthmatic excitement, and I could hear him gasping in a futile effort to regain his speech.

"Oh, all right; do what you can for her till we get there; we'll be right over," I called back. Attempting to ascertain the nature of the illness by questioning the inarticulate domestic would be only a waste of time, I saw, and obviously time was precious.

"Come on," I bade de Grandin. "Something's happened to Arabella Hume; Wilbur is so frightened he's gasping like a newly landed fish and can't give any information; so it may be anything from a broken arm to a stroke of apoplexy, but—"

"But certainly, by all means, of course," the Frenchman agreed enthusiastically. Next to solving a perplexing bit of crime he dearly loved a medical emergency. With deftness which combined uncanny speed with

almost super-human accuracy of selection he bundled bandages and styptics, stimulants and sedatives, a sphygmomanometer and a kit of first-aid instruments into a bag, then: "Let us go," he urged. "All is ready."

Wilbur was pacing back and forth on the veranda when we arrived some half an hour later. His face was blue with cold, and his teeth chattered so he could scarcely form the hurried greeting which he gave us.

"Gawd, gentlemen," he told us tremblingly. "I thought you'd never get here!"

"*Eh bien*, so did we," de Grandin answered. "*Madame* your mistress, where is she, if you please?"

"Upstairs, sir, in her dressing-room. I found her like she is just before I called you. I'd finished lockin' up the house an' was going to my room by way o' the back stairs when I heard the sound o' something heavy falling up the hall toward the front' o' the house, an' ran to see if I was wanted. She didn't answer when I knocked—indeed, it seemed so *hawful* quiet in 'er room that it fair gave me the creeps, sir. So I made bold to knock again; then, when she didn't hanswer, to look in, an'—"

"Lead on, *mon vieux*," de Grandin interrupted. "The circumstances of your discovery can wait, at present. It is Madame Hume that we would see."

The butler was a step or two ahead of us as we climbed the stairs, but as we approached Mrs. Hume's door his footsteps lagged. By the time we stood before the portal he had dropped back to de Grandin's elbow, and made no motion either to rap upon the panels or to turn the knob for us.

"Lead on," de Grandin repeated. "We would see her at once, if you please."

"There's nothing you can do, of course," the servant answered, "but in a cyse like this it's best to have a doctor, so—"

The little Frenchman's temper broke beneath the strain. "Damn yes!" he snapped, "but save your conversation till a later time, my friend. I do not care for it at present."

Without more ado he turned the latch and swung the door back, stepping quickly past the butler into Arabella's boudoir, but coming to a halt on the threshold.

Close behind him, I stepped forward, but stopped with a gasp at what I saw.

Suspended by a heavy silken curtain cord looped twice about her

neck, Arabella Hume hung from the iron curtain rod bridging the archway between her chamber and her dressing-room. A satin-upholstered boudoir-chair lay overturned on its back beneath her and a little to one side, her flaccid feet in their satin evening slippers swung a scant four inches from the floor, her hands draped limply at her sides, and her head was sharply bent forward to the left. Her lips were slightly parted and between them showed a quarter-inch of tongue, like the pale-pink pistil of a blossom protruding from the leaves. Her eyes were partly opened, and already covered with the shining gelatin-film of death, but not at all protuberant.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed.

"My Gawd, sir, ain't it *hawful*?" whispered Wilbur.

"*Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu; c'est une affaire du diable!*" said Jules de Grandin.

To Wilbur: "You say you first discovered her thus when you called Doctor Trowbridge?" he demanded.

"Ye-es, sir."

"Then why in the name of ten million small blue devils did you not cut her down? The chances are she was already dead, but—"

"You daren't cut a 'angin' person down till the coroner's looked at 'im, dast you, sir?" the servant replied.

"*Ohe; sacre nom d'un petit bomhomme!*" De Grandin wrenched savagely at the ends of his mustache. "This chimney-corner law; this smug wisdom of ignorance—it will drive me mad. Had you cut the cord by which she hung when you first saw her, it is possible there would have been no need to call the coroner at all, great stupid-head!" he stormed.

Abruptly he put his anger by as one might lay off a garment. "No matter," he resumed, "the mischief is now done. We must to work. Wilbur, bring me a decanter full—*full*, remember—of brandy."

"Yes, sir," the servant answered. "Thank you, sir."

"And, Wilbur—"

"Yes, sir?"

"Take a drink—or two—yourself before you serve me."

"Thank you, sir!" The butler departed on his errand with alacrity.

"Quick, my friend," the Frenchman ordered, "we must examine her before he returns."

Snipping through the silken strangling cord with a pair of surgeon's scissors he eased the body down in his arms and bore it to the couch, then with infinite care loosened the ligature about the throat and slipped

the noose over her head. "*Morbleu*," he murmured as he laid the cord upon the table, "who taught her to form a hangman's knot, one wonders?"

I took the curtain cord in my hand and looked at it. He was right. The loop which had been round Arabella's neck was no ordinary slip-knot, but a carefully fashioned hangman's halter, several turns of end being taken round the cord above the noose, thus insuring greater freedom for the loop to tighten around the throat.

"It may be so," I heard him whisper to himself, "but I damn doubt it."

"What's that?" I asked.

He bent above the body, examining the throat first with his naked eye, then through a small but powerful lens which he drew from his waistcoat pocket.

"Consider," he replied, rising from his task to regard me with a fixed, unwinking stare. "Wilbur tells us that he heard a piece of furniture overturned. That would be the chair on which this poor one stood. Immediately afterward he ran to her room and knocked. Receiving no response, he knocked again; then, when no answer was forthcoming, he entered. With due allowance made for everything, not more than five minutes could have elapsed. Yet she was dead. I do not like it."

"She might not have been dead when he first saw her," I returned. "You know how quickly unconsciousness follows strangulation. She might have been unconscious and Wilbur assumed she was dead; then because of his fool notion that it was unlawful to cut a hanging body down, he left her strangling here while he ran to 'phone us and waited for us on the porch."

The little Frenchman nodded shortly. "How is death caused in hanging?" he demanded.

"Why—er—by strangulation— asphyxia— or fracture of the cervical vertebrae and rupture of the spinal cord."

"*Precisement*. If Madame Hume had choked to death from yonder bar is it not nearly certain that not only her poor tongue, but her eyes, as well, would have been forced forward by pressure on the constricted blood vessels?"

"I suppose so, but—"

"The devil take all butts. See here—"

Drawing me forward he thrust his lens into my hand and pointed to the dead woman's throat. "Look carefully," he ordered. "You will

observe the double track made by the wide silk noose with which poor Madame Hume was hanged."

"Yes," I nodded as my eye followed the parallel anemic band marked by the curtain cord. "I see it."

"Very good. Now look more closely—see, hold the glass so—and tell me if you see a third—a so narrow and deeper mark, a spiral track traced in slightly purple bruise beneath the wide, white marks made by the curtain cord?"

"By heaven!" I started as his slender finger pointed to the darker, deeper depression. "It's pretty faint, but still perceptible. I wonder what that means?"

"Murder, *pardieu!*" he spat the accusation viciously. "Hanged poor Madame Arabella undoubtedly was, but *hanged after she was dead.*

"This so narrow, purple mark, I know him. Ha, do I not, *cordieu?* In the native states of India I have seen him more than once, and never can it be mistaken for other than itself. No. It is the mark of the *roomal* of the *thugs*; the strangling cord of those who serve Bhowanee the Black Goddess. Scarcely thicker than a harp-string it is, yet deadly as a serpent's fang. See, those evil ones loop it quickly round their victim's neck, draw it tight with crossed ends, then with their knuckles knead sharply at the base of the skull where the atlas lies and, *pouf!* It is done. Yes. Certainly.

"You want more proof?" He rose and faced me with flashing eyes, his little, milk-white teeth bare beneath the line of his mustache. "Then look—" Abruptly he took Arabella's cheeks between his palms and drew her head forward, then rocked it sharply from side to side.

The evidence was indisputable. Such limber, limp flaccidity meant but one thing. The woman's neck was broken.

"But the drop," I persisted. "She might have broken her neck when she kicked the chair from under her, and—"

"Ah bah!" he countered hotly. "That chair-seat is a scant half-meter high, her feet swung at least four inches from the floor; she could not possibly have dropped a greater length than sixteen inches. Her weight was negligible—I lifted her a moment since—not more than ninety-five or ninety-eight pounds, at most. A drop so short for such a light woman could not possibly have broken the spine. Besides, this fracture is high, not lower than the atlas or the axis; the ligature about her neck encompassed the second cervical vertebra. The two things do not match. *Non*, my friend, this is no suicide, but murder cleverly dressed to simulate it."

"Your brandy, sir." Wilbur halted at the door, keeping his eyes averted resolutely from the quiet form upon the couch.

"*Merci bien*," de Grandin answered. "Put it down, *mon vieux*; then call *Monsieur* the Coroner and tell him we await him. If the other servants have not yet been appraised of *Madame's* death it will do no harm to let them wait till morning."

"Poor Arabella!" I murmured, staring with tear-dimmed eyes at the pathetic little body underneath the coverlet. "Who could have wanted to kill her?"

"*Eh bien*, who could have wanted to steal Mademoiselle Alice away? Who wanted to obtain the Devil-Worshippers' marriage belt? Who sent the strange veiled lady following after us to tell us that our quest was vain?" he answered, bitter mockery in his tones.

"Good heavens, you mean—"

"Precisely, exactly; quite so. I mean no more and certainly no less, my friend. This is assuredly the Devil's business, and right well have his servants done it. Certainly."

John Martin, county coroner and leading mortician of the city, and Jules de Grandin were firm friends. At the little Frenchman's earnest entreaty he drove Parnell, the coroner's physician, to perform an autopsy which corroborated every assumption de Grandin had made. Death was due to coma induced by rupture of the myelon, not to strangulation, the post-mortem revealed. Moreover, though Parnell rebelled at the suggestion, Robert Hartley, chief bio-chemist at Mercy Hospital, was called in to make a decimetric test of Arabella's liver. Carefully, de Grandin, Martin and I watching him, he macerated a bit of the organ, mixed it with lampblack and strained it through a porcelain filter. While Parnell sulked in a corner of the laboratory the rest of us watched breathlessly as the serous liquid settled in the glass dish beneath the filter. It was clear.

"Well, that's that," said Hartley.

"*Mais oui, c'est demonstre*," de Grandin nodded.

"Umpf!" Parnell grunted in disgust.

The ruddy-faced, gray-haired coroner looked interrogatively from one to the other. "Just what's been proved, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Absence of glycogen," Hartley answered.

"Murder, *parbleu*!" de Grandin added.

"Nothing—nothing at all," Parnell assured him.

"But"—the coroner began more bewildered than ever.

"*Monseieur*," de Grandin cut him short, "glycogen, or liver-sugar,

represents the stored-up energy of muscular strength in the machines we call our bodies. When it is plentiful we are strong, active, hearty—what you call filled with the pep. As it is depleted we become weakened. When it is gone we are exhausted. Yes.

"Undoubtlessly a woman being strangled would make a tremendous last muscular effort to fight off her assailant. Such an effort, lasting but a little minute, would burn this muscle-power we call glycogen from her liver. Her reservoir of strength would be drained.

"Am I not right?" he turned for confirmation to Hartley, who nodded slow agreement.

"Very well, then. Now, the experiment Doctor Hartley has just performed shows us conclusively that glycogen was practically absent from Madame Hume's liver. Had it been present in even small quantities the filtered liquid would have been cloudy. Yes. But it was clear, or very nearly so, as you did observe with your own two eyes. What then?

"Simply this, *mordieu*. She fought—frenziedly, though futilely—for her life before the vile miscreant who killed her drew his *roomal* tight about her throat and with his diabolically skillful knuckles broke her neck. It was the tightening strangling-cord which prevented outcry, though the chair we found overturned was undoubtedly turned over in the struggle, not kicked aside by her after she had adjusted the hangman's noose about her neck. No; by no means. Had she been self-hanged there would be ample store of glycogen found in her liver; as it is—" he paused, raising shoulders, elbows, and eyebrows in a shrug of matchless eloquence.

"I—see," said Mr. Martin slowly.

But the jury did not. Doctor Parnell's lukewarm reception of de Grandin's theory, Hartley's refusal to testify to anything save that there was a lack of glycogen found in the liver, and the cleverness with which the stage had been set to give plausibility to suspicion of suicide combined to forge a chain of circumstantial evidence which all the little Frenchman's fiery oratory could not break. Suicide—dead by her own hand while of unsound mind, was the consensus of the jury.

5. The Missing Child

HEADLINES SCREAMED ACROSS THE COUNTRY: "Mother Slays Self as Cops Hunt Vanished Child"—"Broken Heart Makes Mother Seek Death"—"Love-Crazed Woman Suicides as Daughter Disappears"—these were among the more conservative statements which faced Americans from Maine to Oregon as they sat at breakfast, and for

a time reporters from the metropolitan dailies were as thick in our town as hungry flies around an abattoir. At length the hue and cry died down, and Arabella's death and Alice's strange disappearance gave way on the front page to the latest tales of scandal in municipal administration.

Jules de Grandin shut himself in the study, emerging only at meal-time or after office hours for a chat with me, smoked innumerable vile-smelling French cigarettes, used the telephone a great deal and posted many letters; but as far as I could see, his efforts to find Alice or run down her mother's murderers were nil.

"I should think you'd feel better if you went out a bit," I told him at breakfast one day. "I know finding Alice is a hopeless task, and as for Arabella's murderer—I'm beginning to think she committed suicide, after all, but—"

He looked up from the copy of the *Morning Journal* he had been perusing and fixed me with a straight, unwinking stare. "The police are co-operating," he answered shortly. "Not a railway station or bus terminal lacks watchers, and no private cars or taxis leave the city limits without submitting to a secret but thorough inspection. What more can we do?"

"Why, you might direct the search personally, or check up such few clues as they may find—" I began, nettled by his loss of interest in the case, but he cut me short with a quick motion of his hand.

"My friend," he told me with one of his Puckish grins, "attend me. When I was a little lad I had a dog, a silly, energetic little fellow, all barks and jumps and wagging tail. He dearly loved a cat. *Morbleu*, the very sight of Madame Puss would put him in a frenzy! How he would rush at her, how he would show his teeth and growl and put on the fierce face! Then, when she had retired to the safety of a pear tree, how he would stand beneath her refuge and twitch his tail and bark! *Cordieu*, sometimes I would think he must surely burst with barking!

"And she, the scornful pussy, did she object? *Mille fois non*. Safe in her sanctuary she would eye him languidly, and let him bark. At last, when he had barked himself into exhaustion, he would withdraw to think upon the evils of times, and Madame Puss would leisurely descend the tree and trot away to safety.

"I would often say to him: 'My Toto, you are a great stupid-head. Why do you do it? Why do you not depart a little distance from the tree and lie *perdu*? Then Madame Puss may think that you have lost all interest and come down; then *pouf!* you have her at your mercy.' But no, that foolish little dog, he would not listen to advice, and so,

though he expended great energy and made a most impressive noise, he never caught a cat.

"Friend Trowbridge, I am not a foolish little dog. By no means. It is not I who do such things. Here in the house I stay, with strict instructions that I be not called should any want me on the telephone; I am not ever seen abroad. For all of the display I make, I might be dead or gone away. But I am neither. Always and ever I sit here all watchful, and frequently I do call the gendarmes to find if they have discovered that for which we seek. I know—I see all that takes place. If any makes a move, I know it. But those we seek do not know I know. No, they think Jules de Grandin is asleep or drunk, or perhaps gone away. It is best so, I assure you. Anon, emboldened by my seeming lethargy, they will emerge from out their hiding-place; then—" His smile became unpleasant as he clenched one slender, stronghand with a gesture suggestive of crushing something soft within it. "Then *pardieu*, they shall learn that Jules de Grandin is not a fool, nor can they make the long nose at him with impunity!" He helped himself to a second portion of broiled mackerel from the hot-water dish and resumed his perusal of the *Journal*. Suddenly:

"*Ohe, misere, calamite, c'est desastrieux!*" he cried. "Read here, my friend, if you please. Read it and tell me that I am mistaken!"

Hands shaking with eagerness, he passed the paper to me, indicating a rather inconspicuous item in the lower left-hand corner of the third page.

CHILD VANISHES FROM BAPTIST HOME, the headline stated. Then:

Shortly after one o'clock this morning Mrs. Maude Gordon, 47, a matron in the Harrisonville Baptist Home, was awakened by sounds of crying from the ward in which the younger children of the orphanage were quartered. Going quickly to the room the woman found some of the older children sitting up in bed and crying bitterly. Upon demanding what was wrong she was told that a man had just been in the place, flashed a flashlight in several of the children's faces, then picked Charles Eastman, eight months, from his crib which stood near the open window, and made off with him.

The matron at once gave the alarm, and a thorough search of the premises was made, but no trace of the missing child or his abductor could be found. The gates of the orphanage were shut and locked, and

the lodgekeeper, who was awakened by the searching party, declared it would have been impossible for anyone to pass in or out without his knowledge, as his were the only keys to the gates beside those in the main office of the home, and the keys were in their accustomed place on his bureau in his bedroom when the alarm reached him. The home's extensive grounds are surrounded by a twelve-foot brick wall, with an overhang on either side, and climbing it either from the outside or from within would be almost impossible without extension ladders.

The Eastman child's parents are dead and his only living relative so far as known is an uncle, lately released from the penitentiary. Police are checking up on this man's movements during the night, as it is thought he may have stolen the child to satisfy a grudge he had against the mother, now dead, whose testimony helped convict him on a charge of burglary five years ago.

"Well?" I asked as I laid the paper down. "Is that what you read?"

"*Helas*, yes. It is too true!"

"Why, what d'y'e mean—" I began, but he cut in hurriedly.

"Perhaps I do mistake, my friend. Although I have lived in your so splendid country for upward of five years, there is still much which is strange to me. Is it that the sect you call the Baptists do not believe in infant baptism—that only those of riper years are given baptism by them?"

"Yes, that's so," I answered. "They hold that—"

"No matter what they hold, if that be so," he interrupted. "That this little one had not been accorded baptism is enough—*parbleu*, it is much. Come, my friend, the time for concealing is past. Let us hasten, let us rush; let us fly!"

"Rush?" I echoed, bewildered. "Where?"

"To that orphan home of the so little unbaptized Baptists, of course," he answered almost furiously. "Come, let us go right away, immediately, at once."^{*}

Maintained by liberal endowments and not greatly taxed by superfluity of inmates, the Baptist Home for Children lay on a pleasant elevation some five miles out of Harrisonville. Its spacious grounds, which were equipped with every possible device for fostering organized play among its little guests were, as the newspaper accounts described, sur-

^{*}Here ended part one in the February 1932 *WEIRD TALES*.

rounded by a brick wall of formidable height with projecting overhangs flanging T-wise, from the top. Moreover, in an excess of caution, the builder had studded the wall's crest with a fringe of broken bottle-glass set in cement, and anyone endeavoring to cross the barrier must be prepared not only with scaling ladders so long as to be awkward to carry, but with a gangway or heavy pad to lay across the shark-tooth points of glass with which the wall was armored. De Grandin made a rapid reconnaissance of the position, twisting viciously at his mustache meanwhile. "Ah, *hélas*, the poor one!" he murmured as his inspection was completed. "Before, I had some hope; now I fear the worst."

"Eh?" I returned. "What now?"

"Plenty, *pardieu*—a very damn great plenty!" he answered bitterly. "Come, let us interview the *concierge*. He is our only hope, I fear."

I glanced at him in wonder as we neared the pretty little cottage in which the gatekeeper maintained his home and office.

"No, sir," the man replied to de Grandin's question, "I'm sure no one could 'a' come through that gate last night. It's usually locked for th' night at ten o'clock, though I mostly sit up listenin' to th' radio a little later, an' if anything real important comes up, I'm on hand to open th' gates. Last night there wasn't a soul, man or woman, 'ceptin' th' grocery deliveryman, come in here after six o'clock—very quiet day it was, 'count th' cold weather, I guess. I wuz up a little later than usual, too, but turned in 'bout 'leven o'clock, I should judge. I'd made th' rounds o' th' grounds with Bruno a little after seven, an' believe me, I'm here to tell you no one could 'a' been hidin' anywhere without his knowin' it. No, sir!

"Here, Bruno!" he raised his voice and snapped his fingers authoritatively, and a ponderous mastiff, seemingly big enough to drag down an elephant, ambled in and favored us with a display of awe-inspiring teeth as his black lips curled back in a snarl.

"Bruno slept right beside my bed, sir," the gatekeeper went on, "an th' winder wuz open; so if anyone had so much as stopped by th' gate to monkey with it, he'd 'a' heard 'em, an'—well, it wouldn't 'a been so good for 'em, I'm tellin' you. I recollect once when a pettin party parked across th' road from th' gate, Bruno got kind o' suspicious-like, an' first thing any of us knew he'd bolted through th' winder an made for 'em—like to tore th' shirt off th' feller 'fore I woke up an called 'im off."

De Grandin nodded shortly. "And may one examine your room for

one little minute, *Monsieur ?*" he asked courteously, "We shall touch nothing, of course, and request that you be with us at all times."

"We-ell—I don't—oh, all right," the watchman responded as the Frenchman's hand strayed meaningly toward his wallet. "Come on."

The small, neat room in which the gatekeeper slept had a single wide window opening obliquely toward the gate and giving a view both of the portal and a considerable stretch of road in each direction, for the gatehouse was built into, and formed an integral part of the wall surrounding the grounds. From window-sill to earth was a distance of perhaps six feet, possibly a trifle less.

"And your keys were where, if you please?" de Grandin asked as he surveyed the chamber.

"Right on the bureau there, where I put 'em before I went to bed last night, an' they wuz in th' same place this mornin' when they called me from th' office, too. Guess they'd better 'a' been there, too. Any one tryin' to sneak in an' pinch 'em would 'a' had old Bruno to deal with, even if I hadn't wakened, which I would of, 'count of I'm such a light sleeper. You have to be, in a job like this."

"Perfectly," the Frenchman nodded, understandly as he walked to the window, removed the immaculate white-linen handkerchief from his sleeve and flicked it lightly across the sill. "Thank you, *Monsieur*, we need not trouble you further, I think," he continued, taking a bill from his folder and laying it casually on the bureau before turning to leave the room.

At the gateway he paused a moment, examining the lock. It was a heavy snap-latch of modern workmanship, strong enough to defy the best efforts of a crew of journeymen safe-blowers.

"*C'est tres simple*," he murmured to himself as we left the gate and entered my car. "Behold, Friend Trowbridge."

Withdrawing the white handkerchief from his cuff he held it toward me. Across its virgin surface there lay, where he had brushed it on the watchman's window-sill, a smear of yellow powder.

"*Bulala-gwai*," he told me in a weary, almost toneless voice.

"What, that devil-dust—"

"*Precisement*, my friend, that devil-dust. Was it not simple? To his window they did creep, most doubtlessly on shoes with rubber soles, which would make no noise upon the frozen ground. *Pouf!* the sleeping-powder is tossed into his room, and he and his great mastiff are at once unconscious. They remove his keys; it is a so easy task. The gate is unlocked, opened; then made fast with a retaining wedge, and the keys replaced upon his bureau. The little one is stolen, the gate closed

behind the kidnappers, and the spring-latch locks itself. When the alarm is broadcast *Monsieur le Concierge* can swear in all good conscience that no one has gone through the gate and that his keys are in their proper place. But certainly; of course they were. By damn, but they are clever, those ones!"

"Whom do you mean? Who'd want to steal a little baby from an orphans' home?"

"A little *unbaptized* baby—and a boy," he interjected.

"All right, a little unbaptized boy."

"I would give my tongue to the cat to answer that," he told me solemnly. "That they are the ones who spirited Mademoiselle Alice away from before our very eyes we can not doubt. The technique of their latest crime has labeled them; but why *they*, whose faith is a bastardized descendant of the old religion of Zoroaster—a sort of disreputable twelfth cousin of the Parsees—should want to do this—*non*, it does not match, my friend. Jules de Grandin is much puzzled." He shook his head and pulled so savagely at his mustache that I feared he would do himself permanent injury.

"What in heaven's name—" I began. And:

"In heaven's name, *ha!* Yes, we shall have much to do in heaven's name, my friend," he cut in. "For a certainty we are aligned against a crew who ply their arts in hell's name."

6. The Veiled Lady Again

HARRISONVILLE'S NEWEST CITIZENS, gross weight sixteen pounds, twelve ounces, delayed their advent past all expectations that night, but with their overdue arrival came trying complications, and for close upon three hours two nurses, a badly worried young house physician and I fought manfully to bring the mother and her twins back across death's doorstep. It was well past midnight when I climbed my front steps, dog-tired, with hands that trembled from exhaustion and eyes still smarting from the glare of surgery lamps. "Half a gill of brandy, then bed—and no morning office hours tomorrow," I promised myself as I tiptoed down the hall.

I poured the spirit out into a graduate and was in the act of draining it when the sudden furious clamor of the night bell arrested my upraised hand. Acquired instinct will not be denied. Scarcely aware what I did, I put the brandy down untasted and stumbled, rather than walked, to the front door to answer the alarm.

"Doctor—Doctor, let me in—hide me. Quick, don't let them see us talking!" the fear-sharpened feminine whisper cut through the darkened vestibule and a woman's form lurched drunkenly forward into my arms. She was breathing in short, labored gasps, like a hunted creature.

"Quick—quick"—again that scarcely audible murmur, more pregnant with terror than a scream—"shut the door—lock it—bolt it—stand back out of the light! Please!"

I retreated a step or two, my visitor still clinging to me like a drowning woman to her rescuer. As we passed beneath the ceiling-light I took glance at her. I was vaguely conscious of her charm, of her beauty, of her perfume, so delicate that it was but the faint, seductive shadow of a scent. A tightly fitting hat of black was set on her head, and draped from this, from eartip to eartip, was stretched a black-mesh veil, its upper edge just clearing the tip of her nose but covering mouth, cheeks and chin, leaving the eyes and brow uncovered. Through its diaphanous gauze I could see the gleam of carmined lips and tiny, pearl-like teeth, seemingly sharp as little sabers as the small, childish mouth writhed back from them in panic terror.

"Why—why"—I stammered—"it's the lady we saw when we—"

"Perfectly; it is *Mademoiselle l'Inconnue*, the lady of the veil," de Grandin finished as he descended the last three steps at a run, and, in lavender dressing-gown and purple kidskin slippers, a violet muffler draped round his throat, stepped nimbly forward to assist me with my lovely burden.

"What is it, *Mademoiselle*?" he asked, half leading, half carrying her toward the consulting-room; "have you perhaps come again to tell us that our search is vain?"

"No, no-o!" the woman moaned, leaning still more heavily upon us. "Help me, oh, help me, please! I'm wounded; they—he—oh, I'll tell you everything!"

"Excellent!" de Grandin nodded as he flung back the door and switched on the electric lights. "First let us see your hurt, then—*mon Dieu*, Friend Trowbridge, she had swooned!"

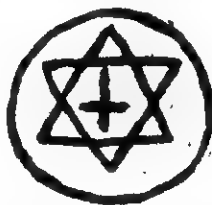
Even as he spoke the woman buckled weakly at the knees, and like a lovely doll from which the sawdust has been let, crumpled forward toward the floor.

I freed one hand from her arm, intent on helping place her on the table, and stared at it with an exclamation of dismay. The fingers were dyed to the knuckles with blood, and on the girl's dark motor coat an ugly dull-red stain was sopping-wet and growing every moment.

"*Tres bien, so!*" de Grandin murmured, placing his hands beneath her arms and heaving her up the examination table. "She will be better here, for—*Dieu des chiens*, my friend, observe!"

As the heavy outdoor wrap the woman wore fell open we saw that it, a pair of modish patent leather pumps, her motor gloves and veiled hat were her sole wardrobe. From veil-swathed chin to blue-veined instep she was as nude as on the day she came into the world.

No wound showed on her ivory shoulders or creamy breast, but on her chest, immediately above the gently swelling breasts, was a medallion-shaped outline or cicatrix inside which was crudely tattooed this design:



"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "What is it?"

"*Precisement*, what is it—and what are these?" the little Frenchman countered, ripping aside the flimsy veil and exposing the girl's pale face. On each cheek, so deeply sunk into the flesh below the malar points that they could only be the result of branding, were two small cruciform scars, perhaps three-quarters of an inch in height by half an inch in width, describing the device of a passion cross turned upside-down.

"Why, of all ungodly things—" I began, and:

"*Ha*, ungodly do you say, *mon vieux?* *Pardieu*, you call it by its proper name!" said Jules de Grandin. "An insult to *le bon Dieu* was intended, for this poor one wears upon her body—"

"I c-couldn't stand it!" moaned the girl upon the table. "Not that—not that! He looked at me and smiled and put his baby hand against my cheek! He was the image of my dear little—no, *no*, I tell you! You mustn't! O-o-oh, *no!*"

For a moment she sobbed brokenly, then: "*Oh, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!* Remember not our offences nor the offenses of our forefathers—spare us, good Lord—I will, I tell you! Yes I'll go to him and tell, if—Doctor de Grandin"—her voice sank to a sibilant whisper and she half rose from the table, glaring about with glazed, unseeing eyes—"Doctor de Grandin, watch for the chalk-signs of the Devil—follow the

pointing tridents; they'll lead you to the place when— oh, *mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!* Have pity, Jesu!"

"Delirium," I diagnosed. "Quick, de Grandin, she's running a pretty high temperature. Help me turn her; the wound seems in her back."

It was. Puncturing the soft flesh a little to the left of the right shoulder, glancing along the scapula, then striking outward to the shoulder tip was a gunshot wound, superficial, but undoubtedly painful, and productive of extensive hemorrhage.

With probe and cotton and mercurochrome we sterilized the wound, then made a gauze compress liberally sprinkled with Senn's mixture and made it fast with cross-bandages of adhesive tape. Three-quarters of a grain of morphine injected in her arm provided a defense against recurring pain and sank her in a deep and peaceful sleep.

"I think she'd best be taken to a hospital," I told him when our work was finished. "We've given all the first aid that we can, and she'll be better tended there—we've no facilities for bed-rest here, or—"

"Agreed," he broke in. "To City Hospital, by all means. They have a prison ward there."

"But we can't put her there," I objected. "She's guilty of no crime, and besides, she's in no condition to go out alone for several days. She'll be there when we want her without the need of bars to keep her in."

"Not bars to keep her in," he told me. "Bars to keep them out, my friend."

"Them? Who—"

"The good God knows *who*, I only suspect *what*," he answered. "Come, let us take her there without delay."

"Can't be done, son," Doctor Donovan told de Grandin when we arrived at City Hospital with our patient. "The prison ward's exclusively reserved for gents and ladies on special leave from the hoosegow, or those with some specific charge pending against 'em. You'd not care to place a charge against the lady, would you?"

De Grandin considered him a moment. "Murder is still a relatively serious offense, even in America," he returned thoughtfully. "Can not she be held as a material witness?"

"To whose murder?" asked the practical Donovan.

"The little Eastman boy's— he who was stolen from the Baptist Home last night," the Frenchman replied.

"Hold on, feller, be your age," the other cautioned. "Who says the

little tad's been murdered? The police can't even find him alive, and till they find his body there's no *corpus delicti* to support a murder charge."

Once more the Frenchman gazed somberly at him; then: "Whether you know it or not, my friend," he answered seriously, "that little one is dead. Dead as mutton, and died most unpleasantly—like the sinless little lamb he was. Yes.

"Maybe you've got some inside dope on the case?" Donovan suggested hopefully.

"No—only reason and intuition, but they—"

"They won't go here," the other cut in. "We can't put this girl in the prison ward without a warrant of some sort, de Grandin; it's against the rules and as much as my job's worth to do it. There might be all sorts of legal complications; suits for false imprisonment, and that sort of thing. But see here, she came fumbling at your door, mumbling all sorts of nonsense and clearly out of her head, didn't she?"

The Frenchman nodded.

"All right, then, we'll say she was batty, loony, balmy in the bean, as they say in classic Siamese. That'll give us an excuse for locking her up in H-3, the psychopathic ward. We've got stronger bars on those windows than we have in the prison ward. Plenty o' room there, too; no one but some souses sleeping off D.T.'s and the effects of prohibition whoopee. I'll move 'em over to make room for—by the way, what's your little playmate's name, anyhow?"

"We do not know," returned de Grandin. "She is *une inconnue*."

"Hell, I can't spell that," Donovan assured him. "We'll have to write her down unknown. All right?"

"Quite," the little Frenchman answered with a smile. "And now you will receive her?"

"Sure thing," the other promised.

"Hey, Jim!" he hailed an orderly lounging in the corridor, "bring the agony cart. Got another customer for H-3. She's unconscious."

"O.K. Chief," the man responded, trundling forward a wheeled stretch-

er. Frightened, pitiful moans of voyagers in the borderland of horror sifted through the latticed doors of the cells facing the corridors of H-3 as we followed the stretcher down the hall. Here a gin-crazed woman sobbed and screamed in mortal terror at the phantoms of alcoholic delirium; there a sodden creature, barely eighteen, but with the marks of acute nephritis already on her face, choked and regurgitated in the throes of deathly nausea. "Three rousing cheers for the noble experi-

ment," Doctor Donovan remarked, an ugly sneer gathering at the corners of his mouth. "I wish to God those dam' prohibitionists had to drink a few swigs of the kind of poison they've flooded the country with! If I had my way—"

"Jasus!" screamed a blear-eyed Irishwoman whose cell we passed. "Lord ha' mercy on us; 'tis she!" For a moment she clung to the wicket of her door like a monkey to the bars of its cage, staring horror-struck at the still form upon the stretcher.

"Take it easy, Annie," Donovan comforted. "She won't hurt you."

"Won't hur-rt me, is it?" the woman croaked. "Won't har-rm me, wid th' Divil's silf mar-rchin' down th' hall beside her! Can't ye see th' horns an' tail an' th' flashin', fiery eyes of 'im as he walks beside her, Doctor darlin'? Oh, Lord ha' mercy; bless an' save us, Howly Mither!" She signed herself with the cross and stared with horror-dazed, affrighted eyes at the girl on the litter till our pitiful procession turned the bend that shut us from her sight.

7. The Mutter of a Distant Drum

IT WAS A WINDY NIGHT of scudding clouds which had brought a further fall of snow, and our progress was considerably impeded as we drove home from the hospital. I was nearly numb with cold and on the verge of collapse with fatigue when we finally stabled the car and let ourselves in at the back door. "Now for that dose of brandy and bed," I promised myself as we crossed the kitchen.

"Yes, by blue," de Grandin agreed vigorously, "you speak wisdom, my friend. Me, I shall be greatly pleased to join you in both."

By the door of the consulting-room I halted. "Queer," I muttered, "I'd have sworn we turned the lights off when we left, but—"

"S-s-sh!" De Grandin's sibilant warning cut me short as he edged in front of me and drew the small but vicious automatic pistol, which he always carried, from its holster underneath his left armpit. "Stand back, Friend Trowbridge, for I, Jules de Grandin, will deal with them!" He dashed the door wide open with a single well-directed kick, then dodged nimbly back, taking shelter behind the jamb and leveling his pistol menacingly. "Attention, hands up—I have you covered!" he called sharply.

From the examination table, where he had evidently been asleep, an under-sized individual bounced rather than rose, landing cat-like on

both feet and glaring ferociously at the door where de Grandin had taken cover.

"Assassin!" he shouted, clenching his fists and advancing half a pace toward us.

"*Morbleu*, he has found us!" de Grandin almost shrieked. "It is the *apache*, the murderer, the robber of defenseless little ones and women! Have a care, monster"—he leaped into the zone of light shed by the desk lamp and brandished his pistol—"stand where you are, if you would go on living your most evil life!"

Disdainful of the pistol as though it were a pointed finger the other advanced, knees bent in an animal-crouch, hands half closed, as though preparing for a death grip on de Grandin's throat. A single pace away he halted and flung wide his arms. "*Embrasse-moi!*" he cried, and in another moment they were locked together in a fond embrace like sweethearts reunited after parting.

"Oh Georges, *mon Georges*, you are the curing sight for tired eyes; you are truly heaven-sent!" de Grandin cried when he had in some measure regained his breath. "Between the sight of your so unlovely face and fifty thousand francs placed in my hand, I should assuredly have chosen you, *mon petit singe*!" To me he added:

"Assuredly you recall Monsieur Renouard, Friend Trowbridge? Georges Jean Jacques Joseph Marie Renouard, *Inspecteur du Service de la Surete Generale*?"

"Of course," I answered, shaking hands with the visitor. "Glad to see you again, Inspector." The little colonial administrator had been my guest some years before, and he, de Grandin and I had shared a number of remarkable adventures. "We were just about to take a drink," I added, and the caller's bright eyes lit up with appreciation. "Won't you join us?"

"*Parbleu*," Renouard assured me, "I do most dearly love your language, Monsieur Trowbridge, and most of all I love the words that you just said!"

Our liquor poured, we sat and faced each other, each waiting for the other to begin the conversation. At length:

"I called an hour or so ago," Renouard commenced, "and was admitted by your so excellent maid. She said that you were out, but bade me wait; then off she went to bed—nor do I think that she did count the silver first. She knows me. Yes. *Bien alors*, I waited, and fell asleep while doing so."

I looked at him with interest. Though shorter by some inches than the

average American. Renouard could not be properly called under-sized. Rather, he was a giant in miniature. His very lack of height gave the impression of material equilibrium and tremendous physical force. Instinctively one felt that the thews of his arms were massive as those of a gladiator and that his torso was sheathed in muscles like that of a professional wrestler. A mop of iron-gray hair was brushed back in an uprearing pompadour from his wide, low brow, and a curling white mustache adorned his upper lip, while from his chin depended a white beard cut square across the bottom in the style beloved of your true Frenchman. But most impressive of all was his cold, pale face—a face with the pallor of a statue—from which there burned a pair of big, deep-set dark eyes beneath circumflexes of intensely black and bushy brows.

"*Eh bien, mon Georges,*" de Grandin asked, "what storm wind blows you hither? You were ever the fisher in troubled water."

Renouard gulped down his brandy, stroked his mustache and tugged his beard, then drew forth a Russian leather case from which he extracted a "Maryland" cigarette. "Women, *parbleu!* One sometimes wonders why the good God made them." He snapped an English lighter into flame and with painstaking precision set his puissant cigarette aglow, then folded his big white hands demurely in his lap and glanced inquiringly at us with his bright dark eyes as though we held the answer to his riddle.

"*Tiens*, my friend," de Grandin laughed. "Had he not done so it is extremely probable that you and I would not be here indulging in this pleasant conversation. But women bring you here and why?"

Renouard expelled a double stream of acrid smoke from his nostrils, emitting a snort of annoyance at the same time. "One hardly knows the words to tell it," he replied.

"The trouble starts in Egypt. During the war, and afterward until the end of martial law in 1923, Egypt, apart from the Continental system of *maisons de tolerance*, was outwardly at least as moral as London. But since the strong clean hand of Britain has been loosed there has been a constantly increasing influx of white slaves to the country. Today hardly a ship arrives in Alexandria without its quota of this human freight. The trade is old, as old as Nineveh and Tyre, and to suppress it altogether is a hopeless undertaking, but to regulate it, ah, that is something different.

"We were not greatly exercised when the numbers of unfortunate girls going from Marseilles increased in Egypt, but when respectable young

girls—*mais oui*, girls of more than mere bourgeois respectability, even daughters of *le beau monde*, were sucked beneath the surface, later to be boiled up as inmates of those infamous Blue Houses of the East—then we did begin to take sharp notice.

"They sent for me. 'Renouard,' they said, 'investigate, and tell us what is which.'

"*Tres bon*, I did commence. The dossiers of half a dozen girls I took, and from the ground upward I did build their cases. Name of a little blue man!" He leaned forward, speaking in a low, impressive tone—scarce in a low, impressive tone scarce above a whisper: "There was devilment, literally, I mean, my friends, in that business. By example:

"Each one of these young girls was of an independent turn; she reveled in the new emancipation of her sex. Oh, but yes! So much she relished this new freedom that the ancient inhibitions were considered out of date. The good God, the gentle Christ Child, the Blessed Mother—*ah bah*, they were outmoded; she must follow after newer—or older—gods.

"*Eh bien*, exceedingly strange gods they were, too. In Berlin, Paris, London and New York there is a sect which preaches for its gospel 'Do What Thou Wilt; This Shall Be the Whole of the Law.' And as the little boy who eats too many bonbons inevitably achieves a belly-ache, so do the followers of this unbridled license reap destruction ultimately. But certainly.

"Each one of these young girls I find she has enlisted in this strange, new army of the freed. She has attended meetings where they made strange prayers to strangers gods, and—eventually she ends a cast-off plaything, eaten with drugs and surfeited with life, in the little, infamous Blue Houses of the East. Yes.

"I found them all. Some were dying, some were better dead, some had still a little way to tread the dreary path of hell-in-life, but all—*all*, my friends—were marked with this device upon their breasts. See, I have seen him so often I can draw him from memory." Taking a black-oilcloth bound notebook from his pocket he tore out a leaf and scribbled a design upon it.

De Grandin and I stared at each other in blank amazement as he passed the sheet to us.

"Good Lord!" I ejaculated. "It's exactly like—"

"*Precisement; la meme chose*—it is the same that Mademoiselle of the Veil displayed," de Grandin agreed. With shining eyes he turned to face

Renouard. "Proceed, my friend," he begged. "When you have done we have a tale to tell."

"Ah, but I am far from done," the Inspector replied. "*Bien non*. I did investigate some more, and I found much. I discovered, by example, that the society to which these most unhappy girls belonged was regularly organized, having grand and subordinate lodgers, like Freemasons, with a central body in control of all. Moreover, I did find that at all times and at all places where this strange sect met, there was a Russian in command, or very near the head. Does that mean anything to you? No?

"Very well, then, consider this: Last year the Union of the Militant Godless, financed by the Soviet government, closed four thousand churches in Russia by direct action. Furthermore, still well supplied with funds, they succeeded in doing much missionary work abroad. They promoted all sorts of atheistic societies, principally among young people. In America on the one hand they gave much help to such societies as 'The Lost Souls' among college students, and on the other they greatly aided fanatical religious sects which aim at the abolition of innocent amusement—in the name of Christ. Associations for making the Sabbath Day unpleasant by closing of the cinemas, the shops and all places of recreation, have received large grants of money from the known agents of this Godless Union. Moreover, we know for certain that much of the legislation fostered by these bodies has been directly proposed by Russian agents posing as staunch upholders of fundamental religion. You see? On the one side atheism is promoted among the young, on the other religion's own ministers are whipped on by flattery or outright bribery to do such things as will make the churches hateful to all liberal-minded people. The scheme is beautifully simple, and it has worked well.

Again: In England only half a year ago a clergyman was unfrocked for having baptized a dog, saying he would make it a good member of the Established Church. We looked this man's antecedents up and found that he was friendly with some Russians who posed as *émigrés*—refugees from the Bolshevik oppression. Now this man, who has no fortune and no visible means of support, is active every day in preaching radical atheism, and in weaning his former parishioners from their faith. He lives, and lives well. Who provides for him? One wonders.

"Defections in the clergy of all churches have been numerous of late.

and in every instance one or more Russians are found on friendly terms with the apostate man of God.

"*Non*, hear me a little further," he went on as de Grandin was about to speak. "The forces of disorder, and of downright evil, are dressing their ranks and massing their shock troops for attack. Far in the East there is the mutter of a distant drum, and from the fastnesses of other lands the war-drum's beat is answered. Consider:

"In the Congo there is renewed activity by the Leopard Men, those strange and diabolical societies whose members disguise themselves as leopards, then seek and kill their prey by night. The authorities are taking most repressive measures, but still the Leopard Societies flourish more than ever, and the blacks are fast becoming unruly. There will be difficulties.

"In Paris, London and Berlin again and yet again churches are despoiled of sacred plate and blessed vestments, the host is stolen from the altar, and every kind of sacrilege is done. A single instance of this sort of thing, or even several, might be coincidence, but when the outrages are perpetrated systematically, not once, but scores of times, and always at about the same time, though in widely separated places, coincidences become statistics. There can no longer be a doubt; the black mass is being celebrated regularly in all the greater cities of the world; yet we do not think mere insult to God is all that is intended. No, there is some central, underlying motive for this sudden and widespread revival of satanism. One wonders what.

"And here another puzzle rises: In Arabia, north of Irak, in the Kurdish mountains, is the headquarters of a strange people called the Yezidees. About them we know little, save that they have served the Devil as their god time out of mind. Had they been strong numerically, they would have been a problem, for they are brave and fierce, and much given to killing, but they are few in number and their Moslem neighbors ring them round so thoroughly that they have been forced back upon themselves and seldom do they trouble those who do not trouble them. But"—he paused impressively—"on Mount Lalesh, where their great temple stands, strange things have been brewing lately. What it is we do not clearly know, but their members have been gathering from all parts of the East, from as far as Mongolia, in some instances, to celebrate some sort of mystic ceremony. Not only that, but strangers—Europeans, Africans, white, black and yellow men, who have no business being there, have been observed en route to Kurdistan, like pilgrims journeying to Mecca. Less than a month ago a party of brigands waylaid some travel-

ers near Aleppo. Our gendarmes rescued them—they were a party of Americans, and Englishmen, with several Spaniards as well and *all were headed for Kurdistan and Mount Lalesh*. Again one wonders why.

"Our secret agents have been powerless to penetrate the mystery. We only know that many Russians have been seen to enter the forbidden city of the Yezidees; that the Yezidees, who once were poor, are now supplied with large amounts of ready cash; and that their bearing toward their neighbors has suddenly become arrogant.

"Wild rumors are circulated; there is talk of a revival of the cult of the Assassins, who made life terrible for the Crusaders and the Musulmans alike. There are whispers of a propheticess to come from some strange land, a propheticess who will raise the standard of the Devil and lead his followers against the Crescent and Cross. Just what it is we do not surely know, but those of us who know the East can perceive that it means war. The signs are unmistakable; a revolution is fomenting. Some sort of unholy *jihad* will be declared, but where the blow will fall, or when, we can not even guess. India? Indo-China? Arabia? Perhaps in all at once. Who knows? London is preparing, so is Paris, and Madrid is massing troops in Africa—but who can fight a figure carved in smoke? We must know at whom to strike before we can take action, *n'est-ce-pas?*

"But this much I can surely tell: One single man, a so-mysterious man whose face I have not seen, but whose trail is marked as plainly as a snake's track in the dust, is always found at hand where the strings of these far-separated things are joined and knotted in a cord. He was a prime mover in the societies to which those wretched girls belonged; he was among those friendly with the unfrocked English clergyman; he was almost, but not quite, apprehended in connection with the rifling of the sanctuary of a church in Cologne; he has been seen in Kurdistan. Across France, England, Arabia and Egypt have I trailed him, always just a little bit too late. Now he is in America. Yes, *parbleu*, he is in this very city!

"*C'est tout!* I must find him, and finding him, I must achieve a method to destroy him, even if I have to stoop to murder. The snake may wriggle, even though his head has been decapitated, but God knows he can no longer bite when it is done. So do I."

Jules de Grandin leaned across the desk and possessed himself of Renouard's cigarette case, extracted from it a vile-smelling "Maryland" and lit it with a smile. "I know the answers to your problems—or some of them, at least—my friend," he asserted. "This very night there came

to us—to this very house—a deserter from the ranks of the accursed, and though she raved in wild delirium, she did let fall enough to tell us how to find this man you seek, and when we find him—" The hard, cold light, which always reminded me of winter sunshine glinting on a frozen stream, came into his eyes, and his thin lips tightened in an ugly line. "When we have found him," he continued, "we shall know what to do. Name of an umbrella, we damn shall!"

"The piecemeal information which you have fits admirably with what we already know and better yet with that which we suspect. Listen to me carefully—"

The sudden jangle of the telephone broke in.

"Doctor Trowbridge?" called a deep bass voice as I snatched up the instrument and growled a gruff "hullo?"

"Yes."

"Costello—Detective Sergeant Costello speakin'. Can you an' Doctor de Grandin be ready in five minutes to go wid me? I'd not be afther askin' ye to leave yer beds so early if it warn't important, sor, but—"

"That's all right, Sergeant, we haven't been to bed as yet," I told him. "We're pretty well done in, but if this is important—"

"Important, is it? Glory be to God, if th' foulest murder that iver disgraced th' Shtate o' Jersey ain't important, then I can't think what is. 'Tis out to th' Convent o' th' Sacred Heart, by Rupleyville, sor, an'—I'll take it kindly if ye'll go along wid me, sor. Th' pore ladies out there'll be needin' a docthor's services, I'm thinkin', an' St. Joseph knows I'm afther needin' all th' expert help that Doctor de Grādin can give me, too."

"All right, we'll be waiting for you," I replied as I put the monophone back in its hooks and turned to notify de Grandin and Renouard of our engagement.

8. "In Hoc Signo—"

THE QUERULOUS CRESCENDO of a squad car's siren sounded outside our door almost as I finished speaking, and we trooped down the front steps to join the big Irish policeman and two other plainclothes officers occupying the tonneau of the department vehicle. "Sure, Inspector Renouard," Costello greeted heartily as he shook hands. "'tis glad I am to see ye this mornin'. There's nothin' to do in this case but worrk like th' devil an' trust in God, an' th' more o' us there's here to

do it, th' better our chances are. Jump in, gentlemen." To the uniformed chauffeur he ordered: "Shtep on it, Casey."

Casey stepped. The powerful Cadillac leaped forward like a mettlesome horse beneath the flailings of a lash, and the cold, sharp air of early winter morning was whipped into our faces with breathtaking force as we sped along the deserted road at nearly eighty miles an hour.

"What is it? What has happened?" de Grandin cupped his hands and shouted as we roared past the sleeping houses of the quiet suburb. Costello raised his gloved hand to his mouth, then shook his head. No voice was capable of bellowing above the screeching of the rushing wind.

Almost before we realized it we were drawn up before the tall graystone walls of the convent, and Costello was jerking vigorously at the bell-pull beside the gate. "From headquarters, Ma'am," he announced tersely, touching his hat as the portress drew back the little wicket in the door and gazed at us inquiringly.

Something more than ordinary silence seemed to brood above the big, bare building as we followed our conductress down the clean-swept corridor to the public reception parlor; rather, it seemed to me, the air was charged with a sort of concentrated, apprehensive emanation of sheer terror. Once, when professional obligations required my attendance at an execution. I had felt some such eerie sensation of concentrated horror and anticipation as the other witnesses and I sat mute within the execution chamber, staring alternately with fright-filled eyes at the grim electric chair and the narrow door through which we knew the condemned man would soon emerge.

As we reached the reception room and seated ourselves on the hard, uncomfortable chairs, I suddenly realized the cause of the curiously anxious feeling which possessed me. From every quarter of the building—seemingly from floors and walls and ceilings—there came the almost mute but still perceptible soft sibilation of a whispered chorus. Whisper, whisper, *whisper*; the faint, half-audible susurrations persisted without halt or break, endless and untiring as the lipping of the tide upon the sands. It worried me, it beat upon my ears like water wearing on a stone: unless it stopped, I told myself, I would surely shout aloud with all my might for no other reason than to drown its everlasting, monotonous reiteration.

The tap of light-soled shoes and the gentle rustle of a skirt brought relief from the oppressive monotone, and the Mother Superior of the nunnery stood before us. Costello bowed with awkward grace as he stepped forward. De Grandin and Renouard were frigidly polite in salu-

tation; for Frenchmen, especially those connected with official life, have not forgotten the rift between the orders and the Government of France existing since the disestablishment of 1903.

"We're from headquarters. Mother," Costello introduced; "we came as quickly as we could. Where is it—she—the body, if ye please?"

Mother Mary Margaret regarded him with eyes which seemed to have wept so much that not a tear was left, and her firm lips trembled as she answered: "In the garden, officer. It's irregular for men to enter there, but this is an emergency to which the rules must yield. The portress was making her rounds a little before matins when she heard somebody moving in the garden and looked out. No one was visible, but something looked strange to her, so she went out to investigate. She came to me at once, and I called your office on the 'phone immediately. Then we rang the bell and summoned all the sisters to the chapel. I told them what I thought they ought to know and then dismissed them. They are in their cells now, reciting the rosary for the repose of her soul."

Costello nodded shortly and turned to us, his hard-shaven chin set truculently. "Come on, gentlemen; let's git goin'," he told us. "Will ye lead us to th' gate?" he added to the Mother Superior.

The convent gardens stretched across a plot of level ground for several hundred feet behind the building. Tall evergreens were marshaled in twin rows about its borders, and neatly trimmed privet hedges marked its graveled paths. At the far end, by a wall of ivy-covered masonry some twelve feet high, was placed a Calvary, a crucifix, nine or ten feet high, set in a cairn, which overlooked the whole enclosure. It was toward this Costello led us, his blue-black jaw set bellicosely.

De Grandin swore savagely in mingled French and English as the light, powdery snow rose above the tops of his patent leather evening pumps and chilled his silk-shod feet. Renouard looked round with quick, appraising glances. I watched Costello's face, noting how the savage scowl deepened as he walked.

I think we recognized it simultaneously.

Renouard gave a short half-scream, half-groan.

"*Sacre nom de sacre nom de sacre nom !*" de Grandin swore.

"Jasus !" said Costello.

I felt a sinking in the middle of my stomach and had to grasp Costello's arm, to keep from falling with the sudden vertigo of overpowering nausea. The lifeless figure on the crucifix was not a thing of plaster or of painted wood, it was human—flesh and blood!

Nailed fast with railway spikes through outstretched hands and slim

crossed feet, she hung upon the cross, her slender, naked body white as carven ivory. Her head inclined toward her left shoulder and her long, black hair hung loosed across the full white breasts which were drawn up firmly by the outspread arms. Upon her head had been rudely thrust an improvised crown of thorns—a chaplet of barbed wire cut from some farmer's fence—and from the punctures that it made, small streams of coral drops ran down. Thin trickles of blood oozed from the torn wounds in her hands and feet, but these had frozen on the flesh, heightening the resemblance to a tinted simulacrum. Her mouth was slightly opened and her chin hung low upon her breast, and from the tongue which lay against her lower lip a single drop of ruby blood, congealed by cold even as it fell, was pendent like a ruddy jewel against the flesh.

Upon her chest, above her breasts, glowed the tattooed mark which we had seen when she appealed to us for help a scant four hours earlier.

Above the lovely, thorn-crowned head where the replica of Pontius Pilate's inscription had been set, another legend was displayed, an insulting, mocking challenge from the murderers: "*In Hoc Signo*—in this sign," and then a grim, derisive picture of a leering devil's face:

IN HOC SIGNO



"Ah, *la pauvre !*" de Grandin murmured. "Poor Mademoiselle of the Veil, were not all the bars and bolts of the hospital enough to keep you from them after all? I should have stayed with you, then they would not—" He broke off, staring meditatively at the figure racked upon the cross, his little, round blue eyes hardening as water hardens with a sudden frost.

Renouard tugged at his square-cut beard, and tears welled unashamed in his bright, dark eyes.

Costello looked a moment at the pendent figure on the crucifix, then, doffing his hat, fell to his knees, signed himself reverently and began a hasty, mumbled prayer for the dying.

De Grandin neither wept nor prayed, but his little eyes were hard

and cold as eyes of polished agate inlaid in the sockets of a statue's face, and round his small and thin-lipped mouth, beneath the pointed tips of his trim, waxed mustache, there gathered such a snarling grin of murderous hate as I had never seen. "Hear me, my friends," he ordered. "Hear me, you who hang so dead and lovely on the cross; hear me, all ye that dwell in heaven with the blessed saints," and in his eyes and on his face was the terrifying look of the born killer: "when I have found the one who did this thing, it had been better far for him had he been stillborn, for I shall surely give him that which he deserves. Yes, though he take refuge underneath the very throne of God Himself, I swear it upon this!" He laid his hand against the nail-pierced feet of the dead girl as one who takes a ritual oath upon a sacred relic.

It was grisly business getting her from the cross, but at last the spikes were drawn and the task completed. While Costello and Renouard examined every inch of trodden snow about the violated Calvary, de Grandin and I bore the body to the convent mortuary chapel, composed the stiffened limbs as best we could, then notified the coroner.

"This must by no means reach the press, *Monsieur*," de Grandin told the coroner when he arrived. "Promise you will keep it secret, at least until I give the word."

"H'm, I can't do that very well," Coroner Martin demurred. "There's the inquest, you know; it's my sworn duty to hold one."

"Ah, but yes; but if I tell you that our chances of capturing the miscreants who have done this thing depend upon our secrecy, then you will surely withhold publicity?" de Grandin persisted. "Can you not, by example, summon your jury, show them the body, swear them in, and then adjourn the public hearing pending further evidence?"

Mr. Martin lowered his handsome gray head in silent thought. "You'll testify the cause of death was shock and exposure to the cold?" he asked at length.

"Name of a small asparagus tree, I will testify to anything!" answered Jules de Grandin.

"Very well, then. We'll hush the matter up. I won't call Mother Mary Margaret at all, and Costello can tell us merely that he found her nude in the convent garden. Just how he found her is a thing we'll not investigate too closely. She disappeared from City Hospital psychopathic ward—the inference is she wandered off and died of exposure. It will be quite feasible to keep the jury from seeing the wounds in her hands and feet; I'll hold the official viewing in one of the reposing-rooms of

my funeral home and have the body covered with a robe from the neck down. How's that?"

"*Monsieur*," de Grandin drew himself up stiffly and raised his hand in formal military salute, "permit me to inform you that you are a great man!"

"*Allons*, speed, quickness, hurry, we must go!" he ordered when the pitiful body had been taken away and Costello and Renouard returned from their inspection of the garden.

"Where are we rushin' to now, sor?" the big detective asked.

"To City Hospital, *pardieu*! I would know exactly how it comes that one whose custody was given to that institution last night should thus be taken from her bed beneath their very noses and murderously done to death in this so foul manner."

"Say, de Grandin, was that gal you and Trowbridge brought here last night any kin to the late Harry Houdini?" Doctor Donovan greeted as we entered his office at City Hospital.

De Grandin favored him with a long, hard stare. "What is it that you ask?" he demanded.

"Was she a professional disappearing artist, or something of the kind? We saw her locked up so tight that five men and ten little boys couldn't have 'got her out, but she's gone, skipped, flown the coop; and not a soul saw her when she blew, either."

"Perfectly, we are well aware she is no longer with you," de Grandin answered. "The question is how comes it that you, who were especially warned to watch her carefully, permitted her to go."

"Humph, I wish I knew the answer to that one myself," Donovan returned. "I turned in a few minutes after you and Trowbridge went, and didn't hear anything further till an hour or so ago when Dawkins, the night orderly in H-3, came pounding on my door with some wild story of her being gone. I threw a shoe at him and told him to get the devil away and let me sleep, but he kept after me till I finally got up in self-defense.

"Darned if he wasn't right, too. Her room was empty as a bass drum, and she was nowhere to be found, though we searched the ward with a fine-tooth comb. No one had seen her go—at least, no one will admit it, though I think someone's doing a piece of monumental lying."

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured non-committally. "Suppose we go and see."

The orderly, Dawkins, and Miss Hosskins, the night supervisor of

the ward, met us as we passed the barred door. "No, sir," the man replied to de Grandin's quick questions, "I didn't see or hear—gee whiz! I wonder if that could 'a' had anything to do with it—no, o' course it couldn't!"

"Eh?" de Grandin returned sharply. "Tell us the facts, *Monsieur*. We shall draw our own conclusions, if you please."

"Well, sir," the man grinned sheepishly, "it was somewhere about five o'clock, possibly a bit later, an' I was sort o' noddin' in my chair down by th' lower end o' th' corridor when all of a sudden I heard a funny-soundin' kind o' noise—sort o' like a high wind blowin', or—let's see—well, you might compare it to the hum of a monster bee, only it was more of a whistle than a buzz, though there was a sort o' buzzin' sound to it, too.

"Well, as I was sayin', I'd been noddin', an' this sudden queer noise woke me up. I started to get up an' see what it was all about, but it didn't come again, so I just sat back an—"

"And went to sleep, eh?" Donovan cut in. "I thought you'd been lying, you swine. Fine chance we have of keeping these nuts in with you orderlies snoring all over the place!"

"Monsieur Donovan, if you please!" Renouard broke in with lifted hand. To Dawkins: "You say this was a high, shrill sound, *mon vieux*; very high and very shrill?"

"Yes, sir, it was. Not real loud, sir, but so *awful* shrill it hurt my ears to listen to it. It seemed almost as though it made me sort o' unconscious, though I don't suppose—"

"*Tiens*, but I do," Renouard broke in. "I think I understand."

Turning to us he added seriously: "I have heard of him. Our agents in Kurdistan described him. It is a sound—a very high, shrill sound—produced by blowing on some sort of reed by those followers of Satan from Mount Lalesh. He who hears it becomes first deafened, then temporarily paralyzed. According to our agents' testimony, it is a refinement of the wailing of the Chinese screaming boys; that high, thin, piercing wail which so disorganizes the hearers' nervous system that his marksmanship is impaired, and often he is rendered all but helpless in a fight."

De Grandin nodded. "We know, my friend," he agreed. "The night Mademoiselle Alice disappeared we heard him—Friend Trowbridge and I—but that time they used their devil-dust as well, to make assurance doubly sure. It is possible that their store of *bulala-gwai* is low, or entirely exhausted, and so they now rely upon the stupefying sound to help them at their work.

"*Mademoiselle*," he bowed to Miss Hosskins, "did you, too, by any chance, hear this strange sound?"

"I—I can't say I did," the nurse answered with embarrassment. "The fact is, sir, I was very tired, too, and was rather relying on Dawkins being awake to call me if anything were needed, so—" she paused, a flush suffusing her face.

"Quite so," de Grandin nodded. "But—"

"But I *did* wake up with a dreadful headache—almost as though something sharp had been thrust in my ears—just before Dawkins reported that the patient in 47 was missing," she added.

Again de Grandin nodded. "I fear there is nothing more to learn," he returned wearily. "Come, let us go."

"Doctor, Doctor darlin', they wuz here last night, like I told ye they'd be!" the drunken Irishwoman called to Donovan as we went past her door.

"Now, Annie," Donovan advised, "you just lie back and take it easy, and we'll have you in shape to go out and get soused again in a couple o' days."

"Annie th' divil, me name's Bridget O'Shay, an' well ye know it, bad cess to ye!" the woman stormed. "An' as fer shlapin' in this place again, I'd sooner shlake in hell, for 'tis haunted be divils th' house is!"

"Last night, Doctor, I heard th' banshee keenin' outside me windy, an' 'Bridget O'shay,' says I to mesilf, 'th' fairy-wife's come for ye!' an' I lays down on th' floor wid both fingers in me ears to shtop th' sound o' her callin'.

"But prisently there comes a throop o' divils mar-rchin' up th' corridor, th' one in front a-playin' on some sort o' divil's pipes which I couldn't hear a-tail, a-tail, fer havin' me fingers shtuck in me ears; an' walkin' clost behind him there wuz two other wans, an' they all wuz walkin' like they knew where they wuz goin'.

"I watched 'em till they tur-rned th' bend, an' then I took me finger from wan ear, but quick enough I shtuffed it back, fer there wuz th' horriblest screamin' noise in all th' place as would 'a' deafened me entirely if I hadn't shtopped me ears agin.

"Prisently they come again, th' foremost wan still playin' on 'is pipes o' hell, an' 'wan o' carryin' sumpin' acrost 'is shoulders all wrapped up in a blanket, whilst th' other wuz a-lookin' round from right to left, an' 'is eyes wuz like peat-fires bur-rnin' in a cave, sor, so they wuz. I ducked me head as he wint past, for well I knowed they'd murder me if I wuz seen, and I know what it wuz, too. 'Twas Satan on earth come fer that

woman ye brung in here last night, an' well I know she'll not be seen agin!"

"Gosh, that *was* some case of jimjams you had last night!" Donovan laughed. "Better see Father O'Connell and take the pledge again, Annie, or they'll be putting you in the bughouse for keeps some of these days. It's true the grl's wandered off, but we don't think anything has happened to her. We don't know where she is, even."

"*Eh bien*, my friend," de Grandin contradicted as we left the psychopathic ward, "you are most badly mistaken. We know quite definitely where the poor one is."

"Eh? The devil!" Donovan returned. "Where is she?"

"Upon a slab in Coroner Martin's morgue."

"For Pete's sake! Tell me about it; how'd it happen; I'm interested —"

"The papers will contain a story of her death," de Grandin answered as he suppressed a yawn. "I, too, am interested greatly — in five eggs with ham to match, ten cups of coffee and twelve hours' sleep. *Adieu, Monsieur.*"

8. Thoughts in the Dark

I WAS TOO NEAR THE BOUNDARY LINE of exhaustion to do more than dally with the excellent breakfast which Nora McGinnis, my super-efficient household factotum, set before us, but Renouard, with the hardihood of an old campaigner, wolfed huge portions of cereal, fried sausages and eggs and hot buttered toast, washing them down with innumerable cups of well-creamed coffee, while de Grandin, ever ready to eat, drink or seek adventure, stowed away an amazing cargo of food.

"*Tres bon*, now let us sleep," he suggested when the last evidence of food had vanished from the table. "*Parbleu*, me, I could sleep for thirty days unceasingly, and as for food, the thought of it disgusts me!"

"Madame Nora," he raised his voice and turned toward the kitchen, "would it be too much to ask that you have roast duckling and apple tart for dinner, and that you serve it not later than five this evening? We have much to do, and we should prefer not to do it on an empty stomach."

"No office hours today, Nora," I advised as I rose, swaying with sleepiness, "and no telephone calls for any of us, either, please. Tell anyone who cannot wait to get in touch with Doctor Phillips."

How long I slept I do not know, but the early dark of midwinter

evening had fallen when I sat suddenly bolt-upright in my bed, my nerves still vibrating like telephone wires in a heavy wind. Gradually, insistently, insidiously, a voice had seemed commanding me to rise, don my clothes and leave the house. Where I should go was not explained, but that I go at once was so insistently commanded that I half rose from the bed, reluctance, fear and something close akin to horror dragging me back, but that not-to-be-ignored command impelling my obedience. Then, while I wrestled with the power which seemed dominating me, a sudden memory broke into my dream, a memory of other dreams of long ago, when I woke trembling in the darkened nursery, crying out in fright, then the stalwart bulk of a big body bending over me, hands firm yet tender patting my cheek reassuringly, and the mingled comforting smell of starched linen, Russian leather and good tobacco coming through the darkness while my father's soothing voice bade me not to be afraid, for he was with me.

The second dream dispelled the first, but I was still a-tremble with the tension of the summons to arise when I struggled back to consciousness and looked about the room.

Half an hour later, bathed, shaved and much refreshed, I faced de Grandin and Renouard across the dinner table.

"*Par l'amour d'un bouc*, my friends," de Grandin told us, "this afternoon has been most trying. Me, I have dreamed most unpleasant dreams—dreams which I do not like at all—and which I hope will not soon be repeated."

"*Comment cela ?*" Renouard inquired.

"By blue, I dreamed that I received direct command to rise and dress and leave this house—and what is more, I should have done so, had I not awakened!"

"Great Scott," I interjected, 'so did I!'

"Eh, is it so?"

Renouard regarded each of us in turn with bright, dark eyes, shrewd and knowing as a monkey's. "This of interest," he declared, tugging at his square-cut beard. "From what we know, it would seem that the societies to which the unfortunate young ladies who first did bring me in this case are mixed in some mysterious manner with the Yezidees of Kurdistan, *n'est-ce-pas ?*"

De Grandin nodded, watching him attentively.

"Very well, then. As I told you heretofore, I do not know those Yezidees intimately. My information concerning them is hearsay, but it comes from sources of the greatest accuracy. Yes. Now, I am told, stretch-

ing over Asia, beginning in Manchuria and leading thence across Tibet, westward into Persia, and finally clear to Kurdistan, there is a chain of seven towered temples of the Yezidees, erected to the glorifying of the Devil. The chiefest of these shrines stands upon Mount Lalesh, but the others are, as the electricians say, 'hooked up in series.' Now, underneath the dome of each one of these temples there sits at all times a priest of Satan, perpetually sending off his thought-rays—his mental emanations. Oh, do not laugh, my friends, I beg, for it is so! As priests or nuns professed to the service of God offer up perpetual adoration and prayers of intercession, so do these servants of the archfiend continually give forth the praise and prayer of evil. Unceasingly they broadcast wicked influences, and while I would not go so far as to assert that they can sway humanity to sin, some things I know.

"I said I did not know the Yezidees, but that is only partly so. Of them I have heard much, and some things connected with them I have seen. For instance: When I was in Damascus, seeking out some answer to the riddle of the six young women, I met a certain Moslem who had gone to Kurdistan and while there incurred the enmity of the Yezidee priests. What he had done was not entirely clear, although I think that he had in some way profaned their idols. However that may be, Damascus is a long and tiresome journey from the confines of Lalesh, where Satan's followers hold their sway, but—

"Attend me"—he leaned forward till the candle-light struck odd reflections from his deep-set eyes—"this man came to me one day and said he had received command to go out into the desert. Whence the command came he did not know, but in the night he dreamed, and every night thereafter he had dreamed, always the same thing, that he arise and go into the desert 'Was it a voice commanding?' I did ask, and 'No,' he said, 'it was rather like a sound unheard but felt—like that strange ringing in his ears we sometimes have when we have taken too much quinine for the fever.'

"I sent him to a doctor and the learned medical fool gave him some pills and told him to forget it. *Ha*, forget that never-ending order to arise and leave, which ate into his brain as a maggot eats in cheese? As well he might have told one burning in the fire to dismiss all thought of torment from his mind!

"There finally came a time when the poor fellow could no longer battle with the psychic promptings of the priests of Satan. One night he left his house and wandered off. Some few days later the desert patrol—

found his burmoose and boots, or what was left of them. The jackals, perhaps with the aid of desert bandits, had disposed of all the rest.

"Now we tread close upon these evil-doers' heels. I have followed them across the ocean. You, my Jules, and you, Monsieur Trowbridge, have stumbled on their path, and all of us would bring them to account for their misdoings. What then?

"What, indeed, but that one of them, who is an adept at the black magic of their craft, has thrown himself into a state of concentration, and sent forth dire commands to us—such subtle, silent orders as the serpent gives the fascinated bird? You, my Jules, have it. So have you, Monsieur Trowbridge, for both of you are somewhat psychic. Me, I am the hard, tough-headed old policeman, practical, seeing little farther than my nose, and then seeing only what I do behold, no more. Their thought-commands, which are a species of hypnotism, will probably not reach me, or, if they do, will not affect my conduct.

"Your greatest danger is while you sleep, for then it is the sentry of your conscious mind will cease to go his guardian rounds, and the gateway to your inner consciousness will be wide open. I therefore think it wise that we shall share one room hereafter. Renouard is watchful; long years of practicing to sleep with one hand on his weapon and one eye open for attack have schooled him for such work. You cannot move without knowing, and when I hear you move I wake you. And when I wake you their chain is broken. Do you agree?"

The thought occurred to Jules de Grandin and me at once.

"Alice—" I began, and:

"Yes, *parbleu*, Mademoiselle Alice!" cried de Grandin. "That message which she had, that constant but not understood command: 'Alice, come home!' It was undoubtedly so given her. Remember, a day or so before she first received it a spy of theirs, pretending to be seeking curios for some collector, came to the house, and saw the marriage girdle of the Yezidees. That was what he wanted, to assure himself that the Alice Hume their spies had run to earth was indeed the one they sought, the descendant of that high priest's daughter of the ancient days, she who had run off with the Christian Englishman. Yes, *par la barbe d'un chat*, no wonder that she could write nothing else upon her ouija board that day; no wonder she puzzled why she had that thought-impression of command to go. Already they had planted in her mind the order to abandon home and love and God and to join herself to their unholy ranks!

"By blue, my Georges, you have solved two problems for us. It was



you who told us of the meaning of that shrilling cry which Friend Trowbridge and I did hear the night on which she disappeared and which made the hospital attaches unable to repel invasion of their ward; now you have thrown more light upon the subject, and we know it was that Mademoiselle Alice had that thought-command to leave before she could suspect that such things were.

"I think it would be wise if we consulted —"

"Detective Sergeant Costello," Nora McGinnis announced from the dining-room door.

"Ah, my friend, come in," de Grandin cried. "You are in time to share a new discovery we have made."

Costello had no answering smile for the little Frenchman's greeting. His eyes were set in something like a stare of horror, and his big, hard-shaven chin trembled slightly as he answered:

"An' ye're in time to share a discovery wid *me*, sor, if ye'll be good enough to shtep into th' surgery a moment."

Agog with interest we followed him into the surgery, watched him

extract a paper parcel from his overcoat pocket and tear off the outer wrappings, disclosing a packet of oiled silk beneath.

"What is it? What have you found?" de Grandin questioned eagerly.

"This," the Irishman returned. "Look here!" He tore the silken folds apart and dumped their contents on the instrument table. A pair of little hands, crudely severed at the wrists, lay on the table's porcelain top.

10. Wordless Answers

DE GRANDIN WAS THE FIRST to recover from the shock. The double background of long practice as a surgeon and years of service with the secret police had inured him to such sights as would break the nerve of one merely a doctor or policeman. Added to this was an insatiable curiosity which drove him to examining everything he saw, be it beautiful or hideous. With a touch as delicate as though he had been handling some frail work of woven glass he took one of the little hands between his thumb and forefinger, held it up to the surgery light and gazed at it with narrowed eyes and faintly pursed lips. Looking at him, one would have said he was about to whistle.

"A child's?" I asked, shrinking from too close examination of the ghastly relic.

"A girl's," he answered thoughtfully. "Young, scarcely more than adolescent, I should say, and probably not well to do, though having inclination toward the niceties of life. Observe the nails."

He turned the small hand over, and presented it palm-downward for my scrutiny. "You will observe," he added, "that they are nicely varnished and cut and filed to a point, though the shaping is not uniform, which tells us that the treatment was self-done, and not the work of a professional manicurist. Again, they are most scrupulously clean, which is an indication of the owner's character, but the cuticle is inexpertly trimmed; another proof of self-attention. Finally"—he turned the hand palm-up and tapped the balls of the fingers lightly—"though the digits are white and clean they are slightly calloused at the sides and the finger tips and thenar region are inlaid with the faintest lines of ineradicable soil—occupational discoloration which no amount of soap and scrubbing-brush will quite remove. Only acid bleacher or pumice stone would erase them, and these she either did not know of, or realized that their continued use would irritate the friction-skin. *Enfin*, we have here the very pretty hands of a young working girl possessing wholesome self-respect, but forced to earn her daily bread by daily toil. A factory op-

erative, possibly, surely not a laundress or charwoman. There is too much work-soil for the first, too little for the second."

Again he held the hand up to the light. "I am convinced that this was severed while she was alive," he declared. "See, it is practically free of blood; had death occurred some time before the severance, the blood would not have been sufficiently liquid to drain off—though the operation might have been made a short time after death," he added thoughtfully.

"Have you anything to add, my friend?" he asked Costello.

"No, sor. All we know is we found th' hands," the Irishman replied. "They wuz found layin' side by side, wid th' fingers touchin', like they might 'a' been clasped in prayer, but had-fallen apart like, *just outside th' wall o' th' convent garden, sor.*"

"*Nom d'un miracle du bon Dieu!*" exclaimed de Grandin, with that near-blasphemous intimacy he affected for the Diety. "I had some other things in mind tonight but this must take precedence. Come, let us go, rush, hasten, fly to where you found them, then lay our course from there until she shall be found!"

The Convent of the Sacred Heart stood on an elevation from which it overlooked surrounding territory, and in the hollow to the east lay the little settlement of Rupleyville, a neat but unpretentious place comprised for the most part of homes of thrifty Italians who had been graduated from section gangs upon the Lackawanna's right of way to small truck-farming, huckstering or fruit-stand keeping. A general store, a bakery, a little church erected to Saint Rocco, and a shop in which two glass globes filled with colored water and the sign *Farmacia Italiana* proclaimed its owner's calling were the principal edifices of the place.

To the latter de Grandin led us, and introduced himself in a flood of voluble Italian. The little, wrinkled pharmacist regarded him attentively, then replied torrentially, waving his hands and elevating shoulders and eyebrows till I made sure both would be separated from their respective sub-structures. At length:

"*Perfetto; eccellente!*" de Grandin cried, raising his hat ceremoniously. "Many thanks, *Signor*. We go at once." To us: "Come, my friends; I think that we are on the trail at last."

"What did you find out, sor?" Costello asked as the little Frenchman led us hurriedly down the single street the hamlet boasted.

"Ah, but of course, I did forget you do not speak Italian," de Grandin answered contritely. "When we had looked upon the spot where you did find the little hands, I told me, 'It are useless to stand here staring at the

earth. Either the poor one from whom those hands were cut are living or dead. In any event, she are not here. If she are alive, she might have wandered off, though not far, for the bleeding from her severed wrists would be too extensive. If she are dead, she could not have moved herself, yet, since she are not here, some one must have moved her. Jules de Grandin, let us inquire.'

"And so I led the way to this small village, and first of all I see the pharmacist's shop. 'Very good,' I tell me, 'the druggist are somewhat of a doctor; injured persons frequently appeal to him for help. Perhaps he will know something.' And so I interrogate him.

"He knew nothing of a person suffering grievous hurt, but he informed me that a most respectable old woman living near had come to him some time ago in greatest haste and implored that he would sell her opium, as well as something which would staunch the flow of blood. The woman was not suffering an injury. The inference is then that she sought the remedies for someone else. *N'est-ce-pas?* Of course. Very well, it is to her house that we go all quickly."

We halted at the small gate of a cottage garden. The paling fence was innocent of paint, but neatly whitewashed, as were the rough plank side-walls of the house. An oil-lamp burned dimly in the single room the cottage boasted, and by its feeble light we saw an old woman, very wrinkled, but very clean, bending over a low bed which lay in shadow.

De Grandin knocked imperatively on the whitewashed door, then, as no answer was forthcoming, pushed back the panels and stepped across the threshold.

The room was nearly bare of furniture, the bed, a small table and two rough, unpainted chairs completing its equipment. The little kerosene lamp, a cheap alarm clock and two gayly colored pictures of religious scenes were the sole attempts at ornament. The aged woman, scrupulously neat in smooth black gown and cheap jet brooch, straightened on her knees beside the bed as we came in and raised a finger to her wrinkled lips. "Qui-et pleez," she murmured. "She iss a-sleepa. I have give"—she sought the English word, then raised her shoulders in a shrug of impotence and finished in Italian—"I give *oppio*."

De Grandin doffed his hat and bowed politely, then whispered quickly in Italian. The woman listened, nodded once or twice, then rose slowly and beckoned us to follow her across the room. "*Signori*," she informed us in a whisper, "I am a poor woman, me; but I have the means to live a little. At night—what you call him? *sì* scrub—I scrub floors in the bank at the city. Sometimes I come home by the bus at morning, some-

times I walk for save the money. Last night—this morning—I walk.

"I pass the *convento* just when the dark is turning into light today, and I go for walk downhill to her I hear somebody groan—*o-oh, a-ah!* like that. I go for see who are in trouble, and find this *povera* lying in the snow.

"*Dio Santo*, what you think? Some devil he have cut her arms off close by the hand! She is bleeding fast.

"I call to her, she try for answer, but no can. What you think some more? That devil have cut out her tongue and blood run out her mouth when she try speak!

"I go for look some more. *Santissima Madonna*, her eyes have been put out! Oh, I tell you, *Signori*, it is the sight of sadness that I see!

"I think at first I run for help; then I think, 'No, while I am gone she may die from bleeding. I take her with me.' So I do.

"I am very strong, me. All my life, in old country, in new country, I worka verree hard. Yes, sure. So I put her on my back—so!—and make the run—not walk, run—all way downhill to my house here. Then I put cloths upon her where her hands should be and put her in my bed; then I run all the way by the *farmacia* for medicine. The drug man not like for sell me *oppio*, but I beg him on my knee and tell him it is for save a life. Then he give it to me. I come back with a run and make soup of it and from it feed her with a spoon. At first she spit it out again, but after time she swallow it, and now she not feel no more pain. She is asleep, and when she wake I give her more until her hurt all better. I not know who she is, *Signori*, but I not like for see her suffer. She iss so young, so pretty, so—what you say?—niza? Yes. Sure."

De Grandin twisted his mustache and looked at her appreciatively. At length: "*Madame*, you are truly one of God's good noblewomen," he declared, and raised her gnarled and work-worn fingers to his lips as though they had been the white, jeweled fingers of a countess.

"Now, quick, my friends," he called to us. "She must have careful nursing and a bed and rest and the best medical attendance. Call for an ambulance from the pharmacy, my sergeant. We shall await you here."

Swiftly, speaking softly in Italian, he explained the need of expert nursing to the woman, adding that only in a hospital could we hope to revive the patient sufficiently to enable her to tell us something of her assailants.

"But no!" the woman told him. "That can not be, *Signor*. They have cut off her hands, they have cut out her tongue, they have put out her eyes. She can not speak or write or recognize the ones who did it,

even though you made them arrest and brought them to her. Me, I think maybe it was the Mafia did this, though they not do like this before. They kill, yes; but cut a woman up like this, *no*. Sicilians verree bad men, but not bad like that, I think."

"*Ma mere*," de Grandin answered, "though all you say is true, nevertheless I shall find a way for her to talk and tell us who has done this thing, and how we best may find him. How I shall do it I cannot tell. but that I shall succeed I am assured. I am Jules de Grandin, and I do not fail. Most of my life has been devoted to the healing of the sick and tracking down the wicked. I may not heal her hurts, for only God's good self can grow new hands and replace her ruined eyes and tongue, but vengeance I can take on those who outraged her and all humanity when they did this shameful thing, and may Satan roast me on a spit and serve me hot in my own gravy with damned, detestable turnips as a garnish if I do not so. I swear it. She shall talk to me in hell's despite."

"*Mais oui*, you must accept it," he insisted as he tendered her a bill and the woman made a gesture of refusal. "Think of your ruined gown, your soiled bed-clothing, and the trouble you have been to. It is your due, not a reward, my old one."

She took the money reluctantly, but thankfully, and he turned impatiently to me. "Stand by, my friend," he ordered; "we must go with her when they have come, for every moment is of preciousness. Me, I do not greatly like the looks of things; the brutal way in which her hands were amputated, the exposure to the cold, the well-meaning but unhygienic measures of assistance which the kindly one has taken. Inflection may set in, and we must make her talk before it is too late."

"Make her talk?" I echoed in amazement. "You're raving, man! How can she talk without a tongue, or—"

"*Ah bah!*" he interrupted. "Keep the eyes on Jules de Grandin, good Friend Trowbridge. The Devil and his servants may be clever, but he is cleverer. Yes, by damn, much more so!"

The trail of chalk-marks the veiled lady mentioned to de Grandin leads to the heart of the temple of the Devil-Worshippers, where the infamous Black Mass is about to be celebrated. Don't miss the second installment of THE DEVIL'S BRIDE in our May issue.

Tales From Cornwall

by David H. Keller, M.D.

(author of *The Abyss*, *Heredity*, etc.)

1. The Oak Tree

Lord Balder was old and tired, no longer able to lift the hammer with which he had slain a giant in his youth. But a stranger came to see him before the arrival of the marauders in their fifty dragon ships . . .

BALDER, LORD OF THE WOLVES, sat before his house in a massive chair, cunningly carved from the solid bole of a birch tree. Every day, except when winter hurled snow over the town and ice-locked the little harbor, he sat in this chair, sleeping at times and occasionally talking to his sons and the little children. His old face was lined with the passing of many years. His hair, once yellow, was now snow white. His family were proud of that hair, and his great-granddaughters quarreled over the right to comb and brush it.

At night he slept peacefully in a large bed, the posts of which were carved with wolf heads. He rested on and was covered with woolens filled with goose down. For many years he had slept alone, ever since his lovely lady, Thyra, daughter of Folkes-King Eric of Westfold, had left

him after love-nesting in that bed till she had given him seven sons and three daughters.

The family lived in a cluster of stone houses. For many years they had been isolated from the world, self-sufficient and well satisfied with life. The sea furnished them food, the forests meat and wood, the pastures grass for their cattle and grain for their geese. Though they had no near neighbors and none had been in battle since Lord Balder was a young man, they spent part of every day playing at war, perfecting themselves in sword fighting, throwing the spear at a target and hurling the hammer.

Six dragon ships floated in the land-locked harbor. When their Lord or one of his sons died they placed him on a ship with all his war gear and his favorite horse and, setting fire to the ship, watched it sail toward the setting sun and Valhalla. Then they built another ship.

Year after year Balder sat in his great chair, saying less and dreaming more. At times he talked of the past glory of the Wolves. He told of their ancestor Scyld, who had come from the faraway land in the West. He had been only a boy when he sailed to Jutland in a rudderless boat, magically steered by the goddess Gefjon, who later married him. From that time the family had been befriended by the gods. Thor had taught them the use of the hammer in battle. When the Wolves were very young he had sent a falling star into the center of the town. It was flat on one side, sharp-pointed on the other and very heavy. A clever smith had attached a handle of hickory wood to this star, fastening it securely, and bound the wood with bands of copper. Around the handle he had woven strips of bulls' hide so it could not slip out of the hand. Balder's father and grandsire before him had used this hammer in battle and it had never failed. None had used it since Balder had last killed with it, for it was so heavy that his sons could do no more than lift it from the ground. Balder kept the hammer clean and polished and it was always near him by the chair during the daytime and on his bed at night, for he thought the time might come when he would need it; but, as the years passed, his strength failed and finally he could only raise it from the ground and hold it proudly on his broad thighs. While he would not admit it, all the family knew that he would nevermore throw it in battle.

One pleasant day in early spring all the Wolves were merry. The young men and girls gathered wood of nine different kinds and placed it on a nearby mountain top to be burned at night as Balder's *Balar*. A pile of toadstools, called *Baran*, was placed nearby so they could be

thrown into the fire to frighten the trolls who roamed the mountains, awaiting a chance to harm the family. The older men went into the forest on a very special mission, while the women were busy preparing food for the feasting. Only the little children had nothing to do, and so they gathered around Lord Balder and listened as he told of the hammer and how he had fought with it in his youth. He often talked thus, but, as he grew older, fact blended with fancy till even he was not certain how many of the enemy he had actually killed. Nevertheless it was all very wonderful to the little ones, and even the adults paused to listen, for they were proud that such a mighty warrior was their Lord.

"Tell us of Balder, the Beautiful; the god you were named after", demanded a flaxen-haired, blue-eyed girl as she climbed up on the old man's knee. The other children shouted, "Tell us the story! Tell us the story!" and then were silent as the old man started to tell the tale, which was his habit each year on the day the Wolves celebrated the return of their favorite god from Valhalla.

"Balder, son of Odin, was, of all the gods, the wisest and most beautiful. One night he had a dream in which he fancied he was dead. He told this dream to the other gods and they determined to safeguard him from every danger. The goddess Frigg, acting for them, made fire and water, iron and all metals, poisons, sickness and all living plants and animals take an oath that they would never harm Balder."

"Did they keep that oath?" asked a boy.

"They did. The gods tested them. They threw stones at Balder, shot arrows at him, hacked him with swords and even built a fire under him, but nothing they did hurt him in any way. However, Loki, the Evil One, was not pleased and asked Frigg, 'Did you give an oath to everything?' and Frigg replied, 'To all except a little plant called the mistletoe, which grows east of Valhalla. It seemed too little to bother with. Then Loki went to Valhalla and found this plant and returned to the place where the gods were amusing themselves shooting arrows at Balder. Only blind Hother did not shoot. Loki asked him why he also did not shoot and he replied that he could not see. Then Loki placed a bow and arrow in Hother's hands and told him to shoot. Hother shot the arrow tipped with mistletoe and it passed through Balder and he died.'"

"What happened then?" asked one of the girls.

"All the gods wept. The women wailed and tore their hair and cried, 'Weep for Balder the Beautiful, for he is dead.' They carried him down to his dragon ship, the *Ringhorn*, which was beached on the shore, but they could not launch it. Then a giantess named Hytrockin came riding

a wolf and she pushed the ship so hard that, as it slid into the sea, fire flashed from the rollers and all the earth shook. They built a funeral pyre on the ship, and on it they placed Balder and his wife Nanna, who had died of grief. They killed Balder's horse and placed him near the dead god, after that they set fire to the ship and started it on the voyage to Valhalla."

"But he came back! He came back!" shouted the children.

"Yes, every spring he comes back to bless the crops and bring warmth, peace and happiness to all his people. That is why we burn the *Balar* and make merry, for he has come back and will be with us until the snow lies heavy on the earth. Then he will return to Valhalla. He is a great god, and I am fortunate to be so named as he."

Then Holga, the oldest son, returned with the other men from the dark forest, carrying bunches of mistletoe.

"Did you have success?" asked Balder.

"Yes, Olaf cut the mistletoe off the sacred oak tree with his arrows. As the branches fell we caught them so they would not touch the ground."

"Good!" exclaimed the old man. "Now divide it with the gold knife. Place branches in every house, and the women shall eat the seeds so that there will be babies next year. Now send me the blind harper."

The harper, led by his pupil, came and sat on a pillow at Lord Balder's feet. He was almost as old as the ruler of the Wolves. For many years he had played on the gold harp with three brass strings and sung songs he had learned from his teacher, who, in turn, had been taught them by an older singer of songs. His pupil sat near him, but his harp was of wood, with strings of braided horsehair. On this he accompanied the blind harper, repeating the words of the song in a soft whisper so that, when the time came, he would become the harper of the family and play on the golden harp.

The blind harper asked Lord Balder, "Is there a special song you would have me sing?"

"Yes," Balder replied. "Sing of the very old days when we ruled in the islands beyond the setting sun, and how, when that land sank beneath the angry sea the boy Scyld, son of Othin, sailed to Zealand, married the goddess Gefjon and founded our family. This is the song that always should be sung on this day."

The harper sang that song, which he had learned from his master, who, in turn, had learned it from his. For many generations that song had been sung, each harper adding new and fantastic touches so that the facts were buried under a mound of fancy; but it was a brave song

and resounded with the past glory of the Wolves. While he sang Balder went to sleep.

Holga's oldest daughter turned to her father. "Tell us how your father won his beautiful bride. Grandfather Balder should tell the tale but now he is asleep and you must tell it for him. Many of us know it, almost word for word, but some of the little ones should hear it again, for no feast of Balder the Beautiful is complete without the telling of the tale."

"I will tell it," her father replied, "though it will come second hand and it would have been better had my father stayed awake to tell it; but he is growing old, and more and more he sleeps in his chair with the Thor hammer on his thighs. Now you children cease from your playing and gather around me. Perhaps the older Wolves will forget, for a little while, their age and pretend they are children listening for the first time to a story of our Lord Balder and how he won his bride, the beautiful Thyra, daughter of Folkes-King Eric of Wearfold, who ruled in the land where the nights are half a year long.

"Balder, son of Olaf, Lord of the Wolves, though only twenty years of age, had voyaged to the southlands seeking treasure from the weaklings of faraway kingdoms. He was a man above the common man, born to command and be obeyed. His father knew full well that some day he would go in a burning ship to Valhalla and longed for his son to sail into the northlands, find and marry a princess, fair-haired and blue-eyed, so the House of Wolves would grow and prosper.

"Balder, wishing to please his father, sailed in his dragon ship with twenty of his best warriors. Driven by wind, the ship sailed north, and wind lacking, the warriors rowed, ten on each side; but ever Balder stood at the helm, steering the ship from pounding surf and treacherous rocks. On and on they sailed until they came to a faraway land, shaken with bitter winds, and there they saw a castle half-buried in the drifted snow.

"Leaving the ship they went to the castle and there gained entrance to the banquet hall, where King Eric sat. High rose the flames in the wide fireplace. All around, the armed warriors sat, while wolfhounds slept contented on the rush-strewn floor. The warriors feasted on seal and bear meat washed down with mead, telling tales of war and love and wild adventures of the past. But King Eric and Prince Balder held quiet converse, asking and answering many questions. Then the King sent an old woman to his daughter, requesting her presence that she might help entertain the Prince.

"She was a woman fair, broad at the shoulders, with deep blue eyes and Saxon hair, the braid of which, when she walked, swept the

floor. One look at her and Balder knew that she would make a loving bride, and fast his heart beat as he felt the wonderment of love.

"Then the King told of a giant, a spear's length and more, who ruled the touching lands. He had few warriors and needed none, for all he leapt against he crushed and with the killings added to his riches. He was a mighty priest, favored by the gods, and none could stand against him.

"This cruel giant had sent messengers demanding that the King should send his daughter with a dower of jewels and much gold, and claiming that the gods had willed that they should wed.

"Balder cried in answer, 'This must never be. I and my twenty Wolves will fight this craven giant and thus make safe your kingdom and protect the maid.' The gracious Princess answered for her father. 'Oh, Prince, you seem a good and kindly man. I grieve to have you die. Yet go, you must, you and your great-limbed warriors. Here is my token. Wear it on your helm; it may protect you in the coming battle.'

"He took her token, wound the golden chain around his helm and told her that he would soon return victorious. The next day and the next Balder and all his men toiled through the drifted snow, and at long last they came to the giant's castle near a lake of crystal ice, windswept of snow. Here they put on skates of reindeer bone and skimming over the ice came to the castle door, where stood the giant awaiting them. Balder cried, 'Thou cur, who cannot kill the prey yourself but eat the carrion nobler bears do leave! The time has come when you shall perish. I and twenty of my warriors have come to speed you on your way and thus rid the land of such a noisome pest.'

"The giant skated to them, glorying in his strength and sure of victory. Though oft wounded, he killed seven Wolves. Then Balder, grief-stricken to see his comrades die, went berserk and threw his hammer at the giant. So great the throw, so sure the aim, the hammer broke through breastplate, shattered ribs and tore the giant's back in two.

"They stripped him of his armor, took his weapons and left his broken body on the ice, fit food for the great meat-eating white owls to feed on. Then, carrying their seven dead, they slowly returned to the castle of King Eric; but before they ate they placed their dead on a dragon ship and sent it burning through the floating ice to Valhalla.

"And after this Balder told them of the battle on the frozen lake and all the banquet hall rang with shouts of praise. That winter Balder and his Wolves guested in the castle, but when summer came again and all the land was green with grass and flowers he sailed southward taking

with him his bride, the lovely Thyra. Olaf rejoiced to see his son again and swore that he had seldom seen a lovelier woman. He bought his dead wife's jewels and her crown and gave them to the proud and happy bride.

"When Olaf died Lord Balder ruled, and wrong and crime were banished from this happy land as mist is scattered by the summer sun. And so the House of Wolves lives on and always will, for nothing can destroy our race as long as we hold fast to courage, pride and faith.

"Now that is the tale so often told by my father. I first heard it when I was but a lad. When he told it on the feast day of Balder the Beautiful he always ended thus: 'Perhaps some of you children may not think the giant was as large as I said, but he was taller than his spear, which now stands in the corner of my house. None of the Wolves, with hand held high, could touch the point. Yet, after he died, we laid that spear beside his body and the point came only to his shoulder. So you may see for yourself that he was a mighty man. Yet, with one blow of the Thor hammer, I broke his back in two.' Thus our Lord Balder ended his story and, now as he is asleep, you may go into his house and see the spear. He always keeps the hammer with him and even now it rests upon his thighs, but it has been many years since he had thrown it at a mark and none of his sons can do much more than raise it from the ground."

Then the older children ran off to play, while the little ones went to see the spear. The men began war games with swords and hammers and the women resumed the preparing of the feast.

Balder, rousing from his sleep, found himself alone. Then a little man, dressed in black velvet, came out of the dark forest and sat at the feet of Balder.

"Welcome, stranger," the Lord said. "I judge you have come in peace, for you have neither sword nor armor."

The little man laughed. "I do not need them. It seemed proper that I visit you and share your pleasure in the greatness of your family."

"Yes. Great indeed. My wife bore me seven sons and three daughters and now I have many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. All worthy members of the House of the Wolves."

"You have every right to be proud of them; and so have I, since I was the father of your beloved wife."

"How can that be?" asked the puzzled Balder. "I thought her the daughter of King Eric; at least he told me so."

"You had a right to believe him. I go by many names but in the

southlands where the sun is warm and the grapes hang heavy on the vines I am called Pan. I often play the pipe, and when I do, all the folk, animals and birds make merry. I have that pipe with me, a simple reed one with but eight notes, yet the music is most pleasant. Let me play for you."

As he played on his pipe the little children gathered around him while the goats ran from the forest and the geese, wings flapping, came from the meadow. They all formed a large circle about him, and round and round they ran, laughing and bleating and honking while the little man played. The young women joined hands with their husbands and danced merrily. Finally the stranger stopped playing and the children returned to their games while the goats went back to the forest and the geese to the meadow.

"I was in the northlands years ago," the stranger said, "and there I met a lovely maid tending a flock of geese. For three days I stayed with her, playing for her pleasure, and then I wandered on. I heard that soon after that she married a great king and bore him a daughter who was called Thyra. Naturally the king thought the little one was his, and he had every right to think so, but his wife knew I was the man who had given her the child. This has often happened when I play the pipe for the pleasure of a maid. So all of the family of Wolves are mine as well as yours, and I am here to protect you from a danger that might, unless you act wisely, destroy them."

"That is a very strange tale," mused Balder. "Part of it seems improbable but, after seeing the children, goats and geese dance when you played the pipe, I can understand how the music might influence the soul of a maiden. But Thyra was a lovely bride and true wife any man should be proud of. If you had known her, as I knew her, for many years, you would be proud of such a daughter."

As they sat talking a runner came, breathing heavily, and bowing to Lord Balder, told of fifty dragon ships coming down the coast to Judand, burning the little towns and spilling blood and dealing death to all who stood against them. Within two days more they would come to the land of the Wolves, and in each ship were twenty-one mighty Norsemen. Balder called his seven sons and told them the news brought by the runner.

"We will stay and fight!" cried one of the younger sons. "Why should the Wolves run from their enemies?"

But the little stranger, though silent, sent advice to Lord Balder and he said to his sons, "We could stay and fight but that would most surely

be the ending of the Wolves, for we are few and they are many." He gave this command to his oldest son, Holga: "Store water and food on our dragon ships and take all of the family—the men, women and children aboard. On the ships place our best stallion and five fine mares and as many goats and geese as you can find room for. Sail as soon as you can and find a new home in the southlands, where I hope you will live at peace with your neighbors. As for me, I cannot, I will not flee, but will wait here till the spinner comes to the end of my life rope and the cutter cuts the strands. Die I must some day, and soon, and it is better to die fighting than in my bed."

"Tonight you will set fire to Balder's *Balar* so he will know that we remember and honor him. In return he may help you in your new life, give large crops and more babies so the House of Wolves will ever prosper. Be sure to take the branches of mistletoe with you to hang in your new homes, for perhaps that magic plant does not grow in the southlands to which you are sailing. I will sleep tonight, but all of you must work loading the ships, for there is no time to waste."

Late the next day the Wolves rowed out of the little land-locked harbor in their six large dragon ships. There were not enough men to sit at the one hundred and twenty oars, so all the women sat with them and the children helped as best they could, two to an oar.

Lord Balder sat in his chair before his house. None of his sons were there to listen to his words of wisdom; no harper played for his pleasure and no little children combed and brushed his hair. To him much of the past was forgotten, while the present seemed like a dream and the future was so hid in a mist of uncertainty that it was useless to worry over it.

Then the stranger came and once again sat on the ground at the feet of Lord Balder, and he asked, "What will you do now?"

"I do not know," Balder replied. "My family are safely sailing to a new home in the southlands. As for me, I am simply waiting to kill and be killed, for I am only one man and cannot prevail against these Norsemen who sail against me in fifty dozen ships. If I were a high rock in the harbor I might wreck the ships flung against me by the waves. If I were a giant oak I could stand in front of my house. The mistletoe would grow on me and the birds would nest in my moss-covered branches. But I am neither a rock nor an oak but only a very old man, so I must die. But when they kill me I will go fighting to Valhalla and, in spite of my age I may be able to take some of these proud Norsemen with me."

"I like the idea of your being a giant oak tree," the little man said

softly. "You have sailed these seas but were never really happy unless your feet touched the earth. I think you would enjoy being an oak. Since that is your desire I will arrange the matter in a way that will be very satisfactory to you but somewhat disconcerting to those warriors who are anticipating the pleasure of killing you."

"I do not worry about dying," answered Balder, "for everyone who lives long enough grows old and finally the old must die like a rotten tree that at last falls to the ground. But I grieve for my Thor hammer. It would be a sorry thing to have it taken by these wild men from the North. For that hammer has been used by the Wolves for many long years. Had I been wise I would have told my oldest son, Holga, to take it with him; but, filled with the pride and foolishness of years, I kept it hoping that I might once again kill with it. I should have known that I have only strength to raise it from the ground and place it upon my thigh."

"If I do all else I will also care for the hammer," the stranger replied, "for I am as proud of it as you. Perhaps Thor sent it falling from the skies, but I helped the old smith when he fastened it to the handle." Then the man played a very simple melody on his pipe and Balder slept.

The next day the dragon ships rowed into the harbor and were beached on the sand while Lord Thordis and all his men waded ashore.

"Where is the town of the Wolves?" Thordis cried. "Only two nights ago we saw a large *Balar* burning on the mountains, so the Wolves must have been here then, yet now, in some way, they are gone. I thought we would find riches here, men to kill and women to pleasure in. Is it possible we landed at the wrong harbor?"

"This should be the place," his son answered, "but there are no houses, no pits of grain, no cattle and no people. Nothing but a barren shore with only one tree, a giant oak, so large it would take long to cut down. But it is a sacred oak and must not be harmed. Somehow the Wolves have escaped us and nothing remains to profit us for the labor of the voyage. We can do nothing but sail on and hope for better fortune in the days to come."

"Now here is a wonderous sight," exclaimed Lord Thordis. "An my eyes do not deceive me, up in that oak, caught between two branches, is the mighty Thor hammer of the Wolves, used by Lord Balder when he was young. I have heard our singer of songs tell of Balder's killing a giant with it. When we sailed here I wanted that hammer more than riches, for they buy little of lasting worth; more than the slaughter of men, for we can do that any day; more than the capture of women, for

one woman is very like all others, and they all age and lose their beauty. So we will cut down the oak and then I will kill with Balder's hammer and, after me, my sons and their sons will kill with it, for Thor sent it from the skies and none can withstand it. That hammer is a weapon like to which there is none other and I must have it."

"Touch not the oak, Father," pleaded his son, "for it is a sacred tree, favored of the gods, and harming it will bring us much woe and little gain."

But Lord Thordis paid no heed and, taking his battle axe, strode to the tree and gave it a cut so deep that he could not pull out the axe. A strong wind made all the branches shiver, and Balder's hammer fell through the air and crashed into Lord Thordis's helmet, scattering his brains on the sand. Seeing their Lord die, all the Norsemen stood very still with fear deep in their hearts, for they knew this killing had been sent by the gods.

While they were still wondering, a storm came from the ocean and a high wave dashed the fifty ships far inland and all the Norsemen were destroyed by the fury of the water. But the giant oak withstood the storm, for its roots were dug deep into the earth and all its branches were sturdy.

Then Pan made a magic so that lightning would never harm the oak nor winter winds tear its branches; and Balder lives on, well content in his new home.

The Reckoning

While no voter expressed dislike of the Ambrose Bierce story, it was the only one in our November issue which never achieved first place, even in a tie. I expected some dislike of Dr. Keller's story, but only one person so voted; there was more dislike for the prose poems. Here are the finals:

(1) *The Eye of Horus*, Steffan B. Aletti; (2) tied between *Once in Thousand Years*, Frances Bragg Middleton, and *Four Prose Poems*, H. P. Lovecraft; (3) *The Abyss* (conclusion), David H. Keller, M.D.; (4) *A Diagnosis of Death*, Ambrose Bierce.

Mr. Aletti has the distinction of having written the first completely new story to win a first place in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*.

The Milk Carts

by Violet A. Methley

Who was driving heavy milk carts over the new golf course every night and ruining the turf at the twelfth hole? There seemed to be no reason for such vandalism . . .

TWO MEN IN PLUS-FOURS TRAMPED over the crest of the down. The taller could best be described as bluff; the other smaller, slimmer, paced more slowly, his lips moving as he measured the yards. Frowning, he made entries in a notebook, examined every crease and fold in the ground, with an eye keen as the hawk's hovering overhead.

"Grand site, eh? High—breezy—fine views—" The bigger man waved his hand with large vagueness, and his companion nodded approvingly, with pursed lips.

"Perfect—couldn't have done it better if I'd planned it myself from the beginning."

Thus did Mr. Seton Croft congratulate the Almighty upon the creation of an ideal natural golf course, that morning in 1931, and did so without any conscious conceit. For years he had practised golf-course construction; he was without a rival in craft and subtlety of bunkers and hazards, and it was his boast never to make two holes alike.

"Good!" Gilbert Scayles, owner of the land, beamed complacently. "Then we'll get it in hand at once—open next Easter, eh? I'll give you a free hand about engaging labor, and you and your wife can live at the lodge to keep an eye on things."

Seton Croft nodded absent-mindedly. "This stretch will make a grand twelfth hole—the longest on the course," he said thoughtfully. "Five hundred yards of turf for fairway—trees on one side—sand pits on the other. Put an artificial bunker midway—and there's the twelfth green."

They were now on the crest of the down; only the mounds of the Roman camp rose higher, and Croft pointed to the half-moon of sandy hollows and out-cropping rock which ended the vista.

As they set off toward it, along the natural fairway, the golf-architect came to a frowning standstill, staring down.

"Sinful, positively sinful!" he muttered. "A glorious fairway spoilt like that."

Right across, from side to side, ran the furrows of wheel-tracks, bitten through the soft skin of turf to the flesh and bone of chalk and rock beneath.

"By Gad, yes—a confounded shame!" Scayles bent to examine the ruts. "They must be turfed over, and I'll stop anyone from driving this way in future. I've got all rights over the land, and I'll see to it at once."

"We'll get the ruts leveled and turfed first thing, then," Croft commented. "Yes, as I thought, the green almost plans itself; it should be one of the best holes on the course."

Seton Croft was not the man to let grass grow under his feet, except where such grass was required, on a new golf course. Within a week, expert labor was engaged and he was established with his wife in the lodge, spending his days on the course, his evenings, with a large sand-filled tray, in which he had constructed a fascinating small-scale model, complete even to the tiny flags on the greens. Croft was a methodical man.

After giving orders for the first roughing-out of the whole course, he concentrated his own attention upon the planning of the first hole, a difficult bit of work. Consequently, it was not for two or three weeks that he took a general survey to see how the work was progressing, and, in the course of it, reached the twelfth hole, and walked along the fairway to view the returfing of the furrows. Once again, Croft stopped short.

"Look here, Long!" he summoned one of the workmen busy on the twelfth green. "Didn't I give particular orders that these ruts were to be leveled and turfed?"

"Yes, sir, and so they were," the man spoke aggrievedly. "But yesterday evening or early this morning carts have been along the track again, tearing it up like you see."

"Confound them!" Croft, who rarely swore, broke out furiously. "Get it put right as soon as possible, and I'll speak to Mr. Scayles at once. This shan't happen again."

Scayles was as indignant as could be wished. Notice-boards were set up, orders sent all round the estate, whilst Croft concentrated upon the repair of the damage, laying fresh soil in the ruts, applying turf like new-grafted skin.

Inquiries had not led to the discovery of the culprits; all the cart-owners in the neighborhood denied having driven across the golf course; as one of them put it, reasonably enough; "It isn't a short cut anywhere, and it don't lead nowhere, so what'd be the sense of doing it?"

But the trouble was not over. Two days after all had been put right, Croft took his wife round the course, to hear her opinion of it as a practical golfer, which he himself was not. She was properly and satisfactorily enthusiastic—until they reached the fairway of the twelfth hole. And there, once again, the turf was torn transversely by those deeply bitten cart-tracks.

Croft lost his temper completely for once. "It'll never be in condition now by the time of the opening," he declared. "It must be some cursed swine of villagers who've made up their minds that it's a right of way across the course, and drive their carts over it on purpose."

In corroboration of his words came a voice from close by, and the Crofts became aware of an aged rustic, with gnarled hands clasped on the top of a knotted stick from which they were almost indistinguishable. He worked his toothless mouth and blinked rheumy eyes, speaking quaveringly.

"Eee, Mester, 'e'll niver keep them ruts smooth, niver in this world," he mouthed. "They'll be druv theer agin."

"Why—do you know who makes them?" Croft demanded.

"Iss—iss!" the old fellow nodded shakily. "For sure I do. 'T'es the milk-carts."

"Where from? Whose milk-carts are they?" Croft asked.

"Can't tell 'ee that. But they do always come, tearing up the ruts, whatever 'ee do. Rattling and clattering, they comes, all the cans a-jangling—they plaguey milk-carts!"

The old man shuffled away, mumbling. Croft could obtain no more information from him, nor did further inquiries help matters much. Scayles and his steward both insisted that there were no dairy-farms with carts and cans in the neighborhood. Moreover, old Ted Hollins was

known to be soft in the brain, and you could not take anything he said for truth; he rambled most of his time.

Nevertheless, the old man's words had made an impression upon Croft, which was to be unpleasantly revived some weeks after the ruts had once more been repaired. For the architect returned to the lodge and his wife one lunchtime, with looks which boded disaster.

"Those cursed carts again!" he burst out. "Deeper tracks than ever. It's the most deliberate blackguardism I ever saw, and there must be connivance in the district. Scayles is furious, and I'm about ready to chuck the whole thing. You can't work against determined opposition like this—it's heartbreaking."

"You'd feel worse if you gave up," his wife said wisely, and Croft nodded, with gloomy assent.

"You're right. I'd rather catch the brutes. The workmen are inclined to give trouble, too—want me to alter the lie of the hole, say they'll make the turf good this once, but not again. And I can't coerce 'em; if those fellows turn sulky and strike, we'll never get the job done in time."

"It's absolutely sickening—but what can you do, dear, to prevent it happening again?" Mrs. Croft said sympathetically.

To that question Croft supplied an answer on the evening after the re-turfing had been again finished. After dinner he put on his boots again, with a grimly set mouth.

"Going out again, dear?" his wife asked.

"Yes—going to spend the night at the twelfth hole," Croft told her. "Going to spend every night there, till I catch those scoundrels. I'm not taking any chance this time; if they come again they'll have me to reckon with. Don't fuss, old girl."

Being a wise wife, Mrs. Croft did not. She contented herself with making sure that her husband put on a warm overcoat, and took a packet of sandwiches and a whiskey-flask in the pockets.

The night was overcast, with a dim moon giving an air of unreality to the whole scene, which Croft felt vaguely, as he took a short cut across the course toward the twelfth fairway.

He walked along the edge of the rough, where sorrel and scabious grew in the yellowish grass. A little squealing creature ran out from almost under his feet, a bird gave a feeble pipe; otherwise it was very silent.

Croft reached a point where the ground fell away on the left, whilst

to the right the slope rose smoothly toward the earthworks of the Roman camp, except for a deep cleft in the downs sparsely filled with bushes. The twelfth green was no more than fifty yards away; the newly-placed turves showed in bright stripes across the brownish-green of the fairway. Croft glanced toward them anxiously, but they were smooth and untouched, and with a sigh of relief he sat down on the edge of the fairway.

It was a lonely vigil. Croft smoked, ate his sandwiches, sat gazing out over the wide, misty stretch of valley, playing fantastically with the idea of it as a huge golf course to be planned, that distant ridge a bunker—that rising field a green. But it was all rather dream-like; Croft was half dozing when the first sound broke the stillness, a clank-clank-clank of metal, the jangle of cans. Old Ted was right then—the milk-carts were coming.

Croft sprang to his feet and looked round. The clanking jangle grew louder, coming from the rising ground on the right, the bush-filled cleft. He thought, now, he could catch men's voices, and the trampling of horse-hoofs was unmistakable.

Anger and irritation came surging back. These malicious bores thought they'd have it all their own way again, did they? Well, they should find out! Croft grasped the stick which he carried and advanced in the direction of the growing sounds.

Suddenly, with clatter of metal and creak of harness a vehicle emerged from the chalk-cleft and swung down toward the smooth turf of the fairway. It was driven, milk-cart fashion, by a driver who stood behind the high, curved front, and behind could be caught a glimpse of another, and another. Croft strode forward, raising his stick threateningly.

"Here, you get way out of this!" he cried. "You've no business here. If you claim any rights, do it through the law courts, not by wilful destruction of—"

His voice trailed off, for no answer came from the driver, and he urged his horse forward steadily. More furious than he had ever been in his life before. Croft snatched at the bridle.

As he did so, something thrust him on one side, some power, scarcely physical, which stunned and bewildered him. He found himself a-sprawl on the turf, with the vehicle sweeping by, clattering, jangling, followed by another, and another. Gleaming with metal-work, drawn by horses under high yokes, they were not quite milk-carts, Croft realized, dragging

himself on to his knees and staring in amazement. The drivers were swarthy, with strong features, and thick bodies, in closely molded leather jerkins.

Straight across the fairway they drove, wheeling into the rough grass beyond; one shouted to another in a strange tongue, which was somehow familiar and they were off, with a clatter and jingle, the drivers bending low—cracking their long whips.

And Croft still watched, dazed and bewildered. . . .

Now they were returning at breakneck speed; they passed close to him; with a clatter and jangle, with a roar and a swirl they were gone, up and away toward the silent, dominant earthworks of the Roman camp.

But Seton Croft, golf-architect, sat huddled on the dry grass, trying to realize what strange spectacle he had seen in the misty moonlight, and what was its meaning.

"Chariots—Roman soldiers chariot-racing, men from the camp on the hill," he whispered. "This is where they did their training, when they were in garrison here—by Gad, yes!"

Presently he rose, and went to where the deep wheel-ruts showed on the new-laid turf, stood staring for some moments. It was almost daylight when he reached the lodge, and found a heavy-eyed wife waiting for him anxiously.


"My dear, you must be half dead," she fussed over him. "I've made a fire, so sit down and get warm, and drink this cocoa—Seton, how funny and dazed you look. Did you catch them?"

"Yes," Croft answered. "I caught them in the act."

"Oh, the wretches! How dared they? Did you give them in charge?"

"No," Croft spoke slowly. "You see, they proved to me that they had a prior claim to be there. . . . I rather think I shall alter that hole after all."

So that is why the twelfth hole of Seton Croft's latest masterpiece in golf courses takes quite an unexpected direction. He tells people who criticize it that there are a lot of things to consider in country districts—rights of user, for instance. It only makes trouble to go against the older inhabitants of a place, when you're laying out a golf course, Croft says wisely.



Cliffs That Laughed

by R. A. Lafferty

(author of *The Man Who Never Was*)

We were delighted to see R. A. LAFFERTY's story, listed above under his name, in the new Ace anthology, *World's Best Science Fiction 1968* (edited by Donald A. Wollheim and Terry Carr). Lafferty's irrepressible humor is in the best tradition of the great jesters: sometimes it gooses, sometimes it whacks but nearly always there is something solid underneath the whimsy. And it is usually so bizarre that a given story could appear in either *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION* or *MOH* with equal justification. You've no idea how much I appreciate that extra bonus.

"BETWEEN TEN AND TEN-THIRTY of the morning of October 1, 1945, on an island that is sometimes called Pulau Petir and sometimes Willy Jones Island (neither of them its map name) three American soldiers disappeared and have not been seen since.

"I'm going back there, I tell you! It was worth it. The limbs that laughed! Let them kill me! I'll get there! Oh, here, here, I've got to get hold of myself.

"The three soldiers were Sergeant Charles Santee of Orange, Texas; Corporal Robert Casper of Gobey, Tennessee; and PFC Timothy Lorrigan of Boston which is in one of the eastern states. I was one of those three soldiers.

"I'm going back there if it takes me another twenty years!"

No, no, no! That's the wrong story. It happened on Willy Jones Island also, but it's a different account entirely. That's the one the fellow told me in a bar years later, just the other night, after the usual "Didn't I used to know you in the Islands?"

"One often makes these little mistakes and false starts," Galli said. "It is a trick that is used in the trade. One exasperates people and pretends to be embarrassed. And then one hooks them."

Galli was an hereditary story-teller of the Indies. "There is only one story in the world," he said, "and it pull two ways. There is the reason part that says 'Hell, it can't be' and there is the wonder part that says 'Hell, maybe it is.'" He was the story-teller, and he offered to teach me the art.

For we ourselves had a hook into Galli. We had something he wanted.

"We used the same stories for a thousand years," he said. "Now, however, we have a new source, the American Comic Books. My grandfather began to use these in another place and time, and I use them now. I steal them from your orderly tents, and I have a box full of them. I have *Space Comics* and *Commander Midnight*; I have *Galactic Gob* and *Mighty Mouse* and the *Green Hornet* and the *Masked Jetter*. My grandfather also had copies of some these, but drawn by older hands. But I do not have *Wonder Woman*, not a single copy. I would trade three for one for copies of her. I would pay a premium. I can link her in with an island legend to create a whole new cycle of stories, and I need new stuff all the time. Have you a *Wonder Woman*?"

When Galli said this, I knew that I had him. I didn't have a *Wonder Woman*, but I knew where I could steal one. I believe, though I am no longer sure, that it was *Wonder Woman Meets the Space Magicians*.

I stole it for him. And in gratitude Galli not only taught me the story-tellers' art, but he also told me the following story:

"Imagine about flute notes ascending," said Galli. "I haven't my flute with me, but a story should begin so to set the mood. Imagine about ships coming out of the Arabian Ocean, and finally to Jilolo Island, and still more finally to the very island on which we now stand. Imagine about waves and trees that were the great-great-grandfathers of the waves and trees we now have."

It was about the year 1620, Galli is telling it, in the late afternoon

of the high piracy. These Moluccas had already been the rich Spice Islands for three hundred years. Moreover, they were on the road of the Manila galleons coming from Mexico and the Isthmus. Arabian, Hindu, and Chinese piracy had decayed shamefully. The English were crude at the business. In trade the Dutch had become dominant in the Islands and the Portuguese had faded. There was no limit to the opportunities for a courageous and dedicated raider in the Indies.

They came. And not the least of these new raiding men was Willy Jones.

It was said that Willy Jones was a Welshman. You can believe it or not as you like. The same thing has been said about the Devil. Willy was twenty-five years old when he finally possessed his own ship with a mixed crew. The ship was built like a humpbacked bird, with a lateen sail and suddenly-appearing rows of wing-like oars. On its prow was a swooping bird that had been carved in Muskat. It was named the *Flying Serpent*, or the *Feathered Snake*, depending on what language you use.

'Pause a moment,' said Galli. 'Set the mood. Imagine about dead men variously. We come to the bloody stuff at once.'

One early morning, the *Feathered Snake* overtook a tall Dutchman. The ships were grappled together, and the men from the *Snake* boarded the Dutch ship. The men on the Dutchman were armed, but they had never seen such suddenness and savagery as shown by the dark men from the *Snake*. There was slippery blood on the decks, and the croaking of men being killed.

'I forgot to tell you that this was in the passage between the Molucca Sea and the Banda,' Galli said.

The *Snake* took a rich small cargo from the Dutch ship, a few able-bodied Malay seamen, some gold specie, some papers of record, and a dark-Dutch girl named Margaret. These latter things Willy Jones preempted for himself. Then the *Snake* devoured that tall Dutchman and left only a few of its burning bones floating on the ocean.

'I forgot to tell you that the tall Dutch ship was named the *Luchtkastell*,' Galli said.

Willy Jones watched the *Luchtkastell* disappearing under the water. He examined the papers of record, and the dark-Dutch girl Margaret. He made a sudden decision: He would cash his winnings and lay up for a season.

He had learned about an island in the papers of record. It was a rich island, belonging to the richest of the Dutch spice men who had gone to the bottom with the *Luchtkastell*. The fighting crew would help Willy Jones secure the island for himself; and in exchange, he would give them his ship and the whole raiding territory and the routes he had worked out.

Willy Jones captured the island and ruled it. From the ship he kept only the gold, the dark-Dutch girl Margaret, and three golems which had once been ransom from a Jew in Oman.

'I forgot to tell you that Margaret was the daughter of the Dutch spice man who had owned the island and the tall ship and who was killed by Willy,' Galli said, 'and the island really belonged to Margaret now as the daughter of her father.'

For one year Willy Jones ruled the small settlement, drove the three golems and the men who already lived there, had the spices gathered and baled and stored (they were worth their weight in silver), and built the Big House. And for one year he courted the dark-Dutch girl Margaret, having been unable to board her as he had all other girls.

She refused him because he had killed her father, because he had destroyed the *Luchtkastell* which was Family and Nation to her, and because he had stolen her island.

This Margaret, though she was pretty and trim as a *kuching*, had during the affair of the *Feathered Snake* and the *Luchtkastell* twirled three sea-men in the air like pinwheels at one time and thrown them all into the Ocean. She had eyes that twinkled like the compounded eyes of the devil-fly; they could glint laughter and fury at the same time.

"Those girls were like volcanos," the man said. "Slim strong mountains, and we climbed them like mountains. Man, the uplift on them! The shoulders were cliffs that laughed. The swaying —"

No, no! Belay that last paragraph! That's from the ramble of the fellow in the bar, and it keeps intruding.

'I forgot to tell you that she reminds me of *Wonder Woman*,' Galli said.

Willy Jones believed that Margaret was worth winning unbroken, as he was not at all sure that he could break her. He courted her as well as he could, and he used to advantage the background of the golden-green spicery on which they lived.

'Imagine about the Permata bird that nests on the moon,' Galli said, and which is the most passionate as well as the noblest-singing of the birds. Imagine about flute notes soaring.'

Willy Jones made this tune to Margaret:

The Nutmeg Moon is the third moon of the year.

The Tides come in like loose Silk all its Nights.

The Ground is animated by the bare Feet of Margaret

Who is like the *Pelepah* of the *Ko-eng* Flower.

Willy made this tune in the Malaya language in which all the words end in *ang*.

'Imagine about water leaping sown rocky hills,' Galli said. 'Imagine about red birds romping in green groves.'

Willy Jones made another tune to Margaret:

A Woman with Shoulders so strong that a Man might ride upon them

The while she is still the little Girl watching for the black Ship

Of the Hero who is the same age as the Sky,

But she does not realize that I am already here.

Willy made this tune in the Dutch language in which all the words end in *lijk*.

'Imagine about another flute joining the first one, and their notes scamper like birds,' Galli said.

Willy Jones made a last tune to Margaret:

Damnation! That is enough of Moonlight and Tomorrows!

Now there are mats to plait, and *kain* to sew.

Even the smallest crab knows to build herself a house in the sand.

Margaret should be raking the oven coals and baking a *roti*.

I wonder why she is so slow in seeing this.'

Willy made this tune in the Welsh language in which all the words end in *gwbl*.

When the one year was finished, they were mated. There was still the chilliness there as though she would never forgive him for killing her father and stealing her island; but they began to be in accord.

'Here pause five minutes to indicate an idyllic interlude,' Galli said. 'We sing the song *Bagang Kali Berjumpa* if you know the tune. We flute, if I have my flute.'

The idyllic interlude passed.

Then Willy's old ship, the *Flying Snake*, came back to the Island. She was in a pitiful state of misuse. She reeked of old and new blood, and there were none left on her but nine sick men. These nine men beg-

ged Willy Jones to become their captain again to set everything right.

Willy washed the nine living skeletons and fed them up for three days. They were fat and able by then. And the three golems had refitted the ship.

"All she needs is a strong hand at the helm again," said Willy Jones. "I will sail her again for a week and a day. I will impress a new crew, and once more make her the terror of the Spice Islands. Then I will return to my island, knowing that I have done a good deed in restoring the *Snake* to the bloody work for which she was born."

"If you go, Willy Jones, you will be gone for many years," said the dark-Dutch Margaret.

"Only one at the most," said Willy.

"And I will be in my grave when you return."

"There is no grave could hold you, Margaret."

"Aye, it may not hold me. I'll out of it and confront you when you come back. But it gives one a weirdness to be in the grave for only a few years. I will not own you for my husband when you do come back. You will not even know whether I am the same woman that you left, and you will never know. I am a volcano, but I banked my hatred and accepted you. But if you leave me now, I will erupt against you forever."

But Willy Jones went away in the *Flying Serpent* and left her there. He took two of the golems with him, and he left one of them to serve Margaret.

What with one thing and another, he was gone for twenty years.

"We were off that morning to satisfy our curiosity about the Big House," the fellow said, "since we would soon be leaving the island forever. You know about the Big House. You were on Willy Jones Island too. The Jilolos call it the House of Skulls, and the Malaya and Indonesia people will not speak about it at all.

"We approached the Big House that was not more than a mile beyond our perimeter. It was a large decayed building, but we had the sudden feeling that it was still inhabited. And it wasn't supposed to be. Then we saw the two of them, the mother and the daughter. We shook like we were unhinged, and we ran to them.

"They were so alike that we couldn't tell them apart. Their eyes twinkled like the compounded eyes of a creature that eats her mate. Noon-day lightning! How it struck! Arms that swept you off your feet and set your bones to singing! We knew that they were not twins, or even sisters. We knew that they were mother and daughter.

"I have never encountered anything like them in my life! Whatever

happened to the other two soldiers, I know it was worth it to them. Whatever happened to me, it was worth it. But I've got to get back there! I don't care if they kill me! They were, those two women, even though we weren't with them for five minutes.

"Then it was the Badger."

No, no, no! That's the wrong story again. That's not the story Galli told me. That's part of the story the fellow told me in the bar. His confused account keeps interposing itself, possibly because I knew him slightly when we were both soldiers on Willy Jones Island. But he had turned queer, that fellow. "It is the earthquake belt around the world that is the same as the legend belt," he said, "and the Middleworld underlies it all. That's why I was able to walk it." It was as though he had been keel-hauled around the world. I hadn't known him well. I didn't know which of the three soldiers he was. I had heard that they were all dead. "Imagine about conspiracy stuff now," said Galli. "Imagine about a whispering in a pinang grove before the sun is up."

"How can I spook that man?" Margaret asked her golem shortly after she had been abandoned by Willy Jones. "But I am afraid that a mechanical man would not be able to tell me how."

"I will tell you a secret," said the golem. "We are not mechanical men. Certain wise and secret men believe that they made us, but they are wrong. They have made houses for us to live in, no more. There are many of us unhoused spirits, and we take shelter in such bodies as we find. That being so, I know something of the houseless spirits in the depth of every man. I will select one of them, and we will spook Willy Jones with that one. Willy is a Welshman who has become by adoption a Dutchman and a Malayan and a Jilolo man. There is one old spook running through them all. I will call it up when it is time."

'I forgot to tell you that the name of Margaret's golem was Meshu-arat,' Galli said.

After twenty years of high piracy, Willy Jones returned to his Island. And there was the dark-Dutch Margaret standing as young and as smouldering as when he had left. He leapt to embrace her, and found himself stretched flat on the sand by a thunderous blow.

He was not surprised, and was not (as he had at first believed) decapitated. Almost he was not displeased. Margaret had often been violent in her love making.

"But I will have you," Willy swore as he tasted his own blood de-

lightly in his mouth and pulled himself up onto hands and knees. "I have ridden the Margaret-tiger before."

"You will never ride my loins, you lecherous old goat," she rant at him like a bell. "I am not your wife, I am the daughter that you left here in the womb. My mother is in the grave on the hill."

Willy Jones sorrowed terribly, and he went to the grave.

But Margaret came up behind him and drove in the cruel lance. "I told you that when you came back you would not know whether I was the same woman you had left," she chortled, "and you will never know!"

"Margaret, you are my wife!" Willy Jones gasped.

"Am I of an age to be your wife?" she jibed. "Regard me! Of what age do I seem to be?"

"Of the same age as when I left," said Willy. "But perhaps you have eaten of the besok nut and so do not change your appearance."

'I forgot to tell you about the besok nut,' said Galli. 'If one eats the nut of the besok tree, the tomorrow tree, the time tree, that one will not age. But this is always accompanied by a chilling unhappiness.'

"Perhaps I did eat it," said Margaret. "But that is my grave there, and I have lain in it many years, as has she. You are inhibited from touching either of us."

"Are you the mother or the daughter, Witch?"

"You will never know. You will see us both, for we take turns, and you will not be able to tell us apart. See, the grave is always disturbed, and the entrance is easy."

"I'll have the truth from the golem who served you while I was gone," Willy swore.

'A golem is an artificial man,' said Galli. 'They were made by the Jews and the Arabs in earlier ages, but now they say that they have forgotten how to make them. I wonder that you do not make them yourselves, for you have advanced techniques. You tell of them and you picture them in your own heroic literature' (he patted the comic books under his arm) 'but you do not have them in actuality.'

The golem told Willy Jones that the affair was thus:

A daughter had indeed been born to Margaret. She had slain the child, and had then put it into the middle state. Thereafter, the child

stayed sometimes in the grave, and sometimes she walked about the island. And she grew as any other child would. And Margaret herself had eaten the besok nut so that she would not age.

When mother and daughter had come to the same age and appearance (and it had only been the very day before that, the day before Willy Jones had returned) then the daughter had also eaten a besok nut. Now the mother and daughter would be of the same appearance forever, and not even a golem could tell them apart.

Willy Jones came furiously onto the woman again.

"I was sure before, and now I am even more sure that you are Margaret," he said, "and now I will have you in my fury."

"We both be Margaret," she said, "But I am not the same one you apprehended earlier. We changed places while you talked to the golem. And we are both in the middle state, and we have both been dead in the grave, and you dare not touch either of us ever. A Welshman turned Dutchman turned Malayan turned Jilolo has this spook in him four times over. The Devil himself will not touch his own daughters."

The last part was a lie, but Willy Jones did not know it.

"We be in confrontation forever then," said Willy Jones. "I will make my Big House a house of hate and a house of skulls. You cannot escape from its environs, neither can any visitor. I'll kill them all and pile their skulls up high for a monument to you."

Then Willy Jones ate a piece of bitter bark from the pokok ru.

'I forgot to tell you that when a person eats bark from the pokok ru in anger, his anger will sustain itself forever,' Galli said.

"If it's visitors you want for the killing, I and my mother-daughter will provide them in numbers," said Margaret. "Men will be attracted here forever with no heed for danger. I will eat a telor tuntong of the special sort, and all men will be attracted here even to their death."

'I forgot to tell you that if a female eats the telor tuntong of the special sort, all males will be attracted irresistably,' Galli said. 'Ah, you smile as though you doubted that the besok nut or the bark of the pokok ru or the telor tuntong of the special sort could have such effects. But yourselves come now to wonder drugs like little boys. In these islands they are all around you and you too blind to see. It is no ignorant man who tells you this. I have read the booklets from your orderly tents: *Physics without Mathematics, Cosmology without Chaos, Psychology*

without Brains. It is myself, the master of all sciences and disciplines, who tells you that these things do work. Besides hard science, there is soft science, the science of shadow areas and story areas, and you do wrong to deny it the name.

"I believe that you yourself can see what had to follow, from the dispositions of the Margarets and Willy Jones," Galli said. "For hundreds of years, men from everywhere came to the Margarets who could not be resisted. And Willy Jones killed them all and piled up their skulls. It became, in a very savage form, what you call the Badger Game."

Galli was a good-natured and unhandsome brown man. He worked around the army base as translator, knowing (besides his native Jilolo), the Malayan, Dutch, Japanese and English languages, and (as every story-teller must) the Arabian. His English was whatever he wanted it to be, and he burlesqued the speech of the American soldiers to the Australians, and the Australians to the Americans.

"Man, it was a Badger!" the man said. "It was a grizzle-haired, glare-eyed, flat-headed, under-slung, pidgeon-toed, hook-clawed, clam-jawed Badger from Badger Game Corner! They moved in on us, but I'd take my chances and go back and do it again. We hadn't frolicked with the girls for five minutes when the Things moved in on us. I say Things; I don't know whether they were men or not. If they were, they were the coldest three men I ever saw. But they were directed by a man who made up for it. He was livid, hopping with hatred. They moved in on us and began to kill us."

No, no, that isn't part of Galli's story. That's some more of the ramble that the fellow told me in the bar the other evening.

It has been three hundred years, and the confrontation continues. There are skulls of Malayan men and Jilolo men piled up there; and of Dutchmen and Englishmen and of Portuguese men; of Chinamen and Philipinos and Goanese; of Japanese, and of the men from the United States and Australia.

"Only this morning there were added the skulls of two United States men, and there should have been three of them," Galli said. "They came, as have all others, because the Margarets ate the telor tuntong of the special sort. It is a fact that with a species (whether insect or shelled thing or other) where the male gives his life in the mating, the female has always eaten of this telor tuntong. You'd never talk the males into such a thing with words alone."

'How is it that there were only two United States skulls this morning, and there should have been three?' I asked him.

'One of them escaped,' Galli explained, 'and that was unusual. He fell through a hole to the middle land, that third one of them. But the way back from the middle land to one's own country is long, and it must be walked. It takes at least twenty years, wherever one's own country is; and the joker thing about it is that the man is always wanting to go the other way.

'That is the end of the story, but let it not end abruptly,' Galli said. 'Sing the song *Chari Yang Besar* if you remember the tune. Imagine about flute notes lingering in the air.'

"I was lost for more than twenty years, and that's a fact," the man said. He gripped the bar with the most knotted hands I ever saw, and laughed with a merriment so deep that it seemed to be his bones laughing. "Did you know that there's another world just under this world, or just around the corner from it? I walked all day every day. I was in a torture, for I suspected that I was going the wrong way, and I could go no other. And I sometimes suspected that the middle land through which I traveled was in my head, a derangement from the terrible blow that one of the Things gave me as he came in to kill me. And yet there are correlates that convince me it was a real place.

"I wasn't trying to get home: I was trying to get back to those girls even if it killed me. There weren't any colors in that world, all gray tones, but otherwise it wasn't much different from this one. There were even bars there a little like the Red Rooster."

(I forgot to tell you that it was in the Red Rooster bar that the soldier from the islands told me the parts of his story.)

"I've got to get back there. I think I know the way now, and how to get on the road. I have to travel it through the middle land, you know. They'll kill me, of course, and I won't even get to jazz those girls for five minutes; but I've got to get back there. Going to take me another twenty years, though. That sure is a weary walk."

I never knew him well, and I don't remember which of the names was his. But a man from Orange, Texas, or from Gobey, Tennessee, or from Boston, in one of the eastern states, is on a twenty-year walk through the Middle Land to find the dark-Dutch Margarets, and death.

I looked up a couple of things yesterday. There was Revel's recent work on Moluccan Narcotics. He tells of the Besok Nut which *does* seem to inhibit ageing but which induces internal distraction and hypersexuality. There is the Pokok Ru whose bitter bark impels even the most gentle to violent anger. There is one sort of Telor Tuntong which sets up an inexplicable aura about a woman eater and draws all males overpoweringly to her. There is much research still to be done on these narcotics, Revel writes.

I dipped into Mandrago's *Earthquake and Legend and the Middle World*. He states that the earthquake belt around the world is also the legend belt, and that one of the underlying legends is of the underlying land, the middle world below this world where one can wander lost forever.

And I went down to the Red Rooster again the next evening, which was last evening, to ask about the man and to see if he could give me a more cogent account. For I had re-remembered Galli's old story in the meanwhile.

"No, he was just passing through town," the bar-man said. "Had a long trip ahead of him. He was sort of a nutty fellow. I've often said the same thing about you."

That is the end of the other story, but let it not end suddenly. Pause for a moment to savor it. Sing the song *Itu Masa Dahulu* if you remember the tune.

Imagine about flute notes falling. I don't have a flute, but a story should end so.



Flight

by James W. Bennett &

Soong Kwen-Ling

A strange tale which depicts the Taoist philosophy and teaching.

THE WHALE-OIL LAMP IN MY CHAMBER grew dim. I dropped the telegram, which I could not bear to read a second time. I gave ample allowance to the justice of death in calling away the very young or the very aged. The children were saved the knowledge of the suffering and misery of life, the ancient ones from bearing their ills too long. But to call away those in the prime, those who have helpless coterie of dependents looking to them—it was unfair!

Suddenly the flame of my lamp grew more dim. It brightened, then dimmed again, as if two shadows had crossed before it. After that it drooped to a tiny pinpoint of light, and the room appeared full of moving shapes.

This sense of motion was followed by sound. I heard soft, sibilant whisperings. Eagerly I strained my ears. After a moment I recognized words—or thought I did—for the tones were so soft that I had continuously to piece them together.

"Aren't you glad of this emancipation?" came the question. The muffled voice was queerly familiar. Could it be my younger brother?

"Glad? Of course!" came a reply from across the room.

My heart was pounding. This second voice was that of my elder brother, a whispering echo of his voice. It went on: "Let us think no more of life. We could not go back to it if we would."

There was an interval of silence; then my younger brother spoke regretfully, wistfully, "Yet, even at this moment our children are weeping and urging us to stay."

The shadow, whence had come the voice of my elder brother, stirred. "True! And because of that, we must take our last look at him who stays. Perhaps we can make him feel that we are here and are saying farewell—"

"It is too late!" interrupted my younger brother. "The Messenger is here—"

"Yes, it is too late!" broke in a booming voice.

The lamp flickered and then, to my poignant regret, it went out. I was in darkness of such an intensity that I gasped. It was like a sable cloak. Through its folds drifted the voice that had last spoken, its resonance diminishing: "Too late! Hurry! Your sedan chairs are waiting for you! Hurry!"

I do not know why the mad urge to follow them struck me, yet it was compelling. In the thick blackness I groped for the door. I discovered that the door was gone, that the side walls of the room were gone. Yet this did not strike me as being odd. I accepted it. The air, I noted, had grown cool and fresh.

As I groped along, I suddenly found myself confronted by a wall—a wall of cold, smooth stone. To my left, as I threw out my hand, was a second wall. Behind me, grotesquely enough, a third wall had sprung up. I asked myself calmly: was I to be walled up! To die? But I felt no fear. Then, to my right, my hand found no staying surface of stone. As I began to move slowly in this direction, the wall behind me moved with me, blocking a backward step.

The path was oppressively long, but at last I succeeded in reaching its termination. There I was caught by a current of air drawing me into a twilight region. The illumination was faint, like the gray light which presages the sunrise.

A broad thoroughfare ran straight before me, seemingly to infinity. A throng of persons, reaching as far as my eye could distinguish, were moving in the roadway, taking the direction of that great propulsion of air. I was soon swept in among them, although none paid the slightest heed to me. I saw women of all ages moving at the right side of the road; the men took their way at the left. No one spoke, even the shuffle

of their feet made no sound. All journeyed in a vast preoccupation and bemusement.

While traveling with this silent throng, I saw an old man approaching, the only traveler who pursued the opposite direction. Yet the crowd paid no more heed to him than they did to one another—or to me. He spread out his arms, barring my way, and said in a resonant voice: "You do not belong here. Come back with me."

I recognized his voice. It was that of the shadow which had taken away my brothers, the entity called by them the Messenger.

"But I cannot go back," I answered him. "The wall closed behind me."

"Then it is the will of the Gods that you go on."

"I am following my two brothers. Have you seen them on the way?"

"Seen your brothers?" he queried with what I thought was a touch of exasperation. "How should I know, when I meet so many?"

I quickly described to him the appearance of my brothers. But still he shook his head. Then he asked sharply: "They were walking, of course?"

"No," I replied. "I heard your voice say that their chairs were ready."

He nodded. "I know whom you mean, now." Beckoning to me to follow, he turned and began retracing his steps, moving in the same direction as the crowd.

After traveling for a space in silence, I asked him: "Why do all these folk walk? You told my brothers that their carrying-chairs were waiting, yet I have seen no chairs on this road."

He answered curtly: "Those who ride are men whose services are needed on high. They take another path—but their destination is the same as these."

"But why do these men and women wear such sad faces?"

"That should not be difficult to guess! They are the foolish ones who are not yet willing to give up the world."

Here my further questions concerning these fellow pilgrims were cut short. We had arrived at an incredibly steep ascent. I offered to assist my guide, who seemed too old to hope to negotiate it. He ignored my outstretched hand and mounted the path with all the vigor of youth.

At the summit the path debouched upon a great plateau. Here a girl stood, garbed in beautiful silks but with vacant, indrawn eyes as of one who day-dreams. With graceful yet mechanical gestures, she ladled, from a white jade jar that was apparently inexhaustible, a liquid. It was golden in color and fragrant with the nectar of a thousand blended fruits.

The ascent had been so wearisome and the perfume of the draft so enticing that each traveler drank his fill.

I would gladly have joined the patient line, each awaiting his turn to drink his eyes fixed hypnotically upon the golden liquid, but the Messenger caught my arm firmly and swung me past. He paid no heed to my remonstrances. After a moment I saw why he had been unwilling for me to partake of the draft. For, stretching out as far as the eye could reach, lay the recumbent bodies of travelers who had gone before. Countless thousands of them.

"They have drunk the wine of forgetfulness," said my guide. "This is the Garden of Rest, after their long and painful journey and their steep climb."

"What is the duration of their sleep?"

"They remain here for ten Kalpas. If the good they have done in the world does not survive that period, they will be lost in eternal sleep."

"But my brothers!" I said in alarm. "Perhaps they are sleeping here. Sleeping the allotted ten times ten eons."

"No. Those who travel in the carrying-chairs have not been wearied by the journey—and they are not tempted to drink. Did I not tell you that your brothers were needed on high?"

We walked along in the grayness, picking our way amid the sleeping figures. So engrossed was I that I held my eyes on the ground. The Messenger spoke: "Lift your face. See those gleams of light ahead? They presage the dawn of heavenly existence for those whose good works in life have endured."

I looked into the zenith. Swinging across the heavens in mighty striations were clouds of gay and brilliant colors. But before I had time to savor their magnificence and beauty, my guide commanded: "Touch the sleeve of my robe."

I obeyed and instantly we were borne into ethereal space. The Garden of Rest stretched out limitlessly below, dotted with its tiny, sleeping figures. I saw the steep hill where the hordes were toiling upward with such pertinacity—to oblivion.

The sensation of motion ceased. I found that I no longer touched the sleeve of the Messenger's robe: I stood alone on the summit of a verdured hill. Just below me, a stream of chiming silver flowed through flower-embossed meadows. The Garden of Rest and its travelers had vanished. Approaching me were two persons, their robes glittering in the warm rosy light, so different from that cool gray illumination that had

tinged the horizon above the countless sleeping pilgrims. Like two young gods the pair approached me.

I stared an instant, dazzled; then I ran toward them with a glad cry of recognition. They each caught me by the hand.

"Why have you come here?" my eldest brother asked. "We had not heard that you were summoned." His voice was gentle, yet puzzled.

"To see you! To see you both!" I answered eagerly. "Is this where you dwell?"

"Beyond the stream," my younger brother replied.

I looked and now, for the first time, I saw, hazily dim, rows of lofty, temple-like buildings. Their roofs gleamed with the patina of gold lacquer.

"So many of them?" I asked, bemused.

They smiled at me and my elder brother spoke: "Not for us alone. Our parents are there, and so are our forefathers."

"Our father and mother?" I cried, "Let me go to them! I must see them!"

The smile on the lips of my two brothers was replaced by a look of sadness.

"No," my elder brother said quietly. "It is not yet time for you to see them. You are meeting us only because you must have seized that precious moment when we were allowed to return to look upon you for the last time." Reluctantly but firmly he took my younger brother by the arm and turned away.

"Wait!" I cried out in alarm. "Don't go, yet! I have only seen you for an instant!"

"Perhaps"—my younger brother's voice was uncertain—"perhaps They will not be angry if we go a brief way with you on your return journey."

"But I do not wish to return!" I said despairingly.

But even as I spoke, a strand of rosy cloud drifted down and wrapped me in soft, warm mist. I could no longer see my brothers but I could feel the hand of each on my arms. Gently they pushed me forward. I could detect that we were climbing a hill but one not so steep as that tortuous rise just preceding the entry to the Garden of Rest.

Then the cloud thinned slightly and I found myself on the verge of a sheer precipice. I could still feel the reassuring pressure of my brothers' hands but I could not see them. I stared in horror at the yawning, mist-filled depths below, then closed my eyes to shut out the view.

I felt the cliff shake and crack. It became detached and down we drop-

ped. Yet the descent was slow and gentle. I opened my eyes but discerned nothing; that same cloud was masking my vision. I had the sensation that I was coming nearer and nearer the earth, as that descent continued. At last we came to a halt.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"At a wayside resting-place." It was my younger brother's voice. It came from my right.

I could not feel the pressure of my elder brother's hand and, as though reading my mind, my younger brother volunteered: "He has gone only for a moment, to bring his pearls to show you."

"His pearls?" I repeated in surprise.

"Yes," affirmed my younger brother. "While we wait, I will show you mine. Put out your hand."

He poured into my palm a number of satiny, smooth stones. By bringing them near my eyes I could distinguish an unearthly, glorious luster, like—yet strangely unlike—pearls.

"Where did you get such as these?" I asked.

"From home. They are from my wife's heart. . . . They were once her tears."

"Then, in this life, you remember those who linger in the world?"

(Turn to page 111)

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The White Dog

by Feodor Sologub

"Yes, I am a crow; only I have no wings . . . And when I see a doomed person I have such a strong desire to caw."

EVERYTHING WAS IRKSOME for Alexandra Ivanovna in the workshop of this out-of-the-way town. It was the shop in which she had served as apprentice and now for several years as seamstress. Everything irritated Alexandra Ivanovna; she quarreled with everyone and abused the apprentices. Among others to suffer from her tantrums was Tanechka, the youngest of the seamstresses, who had only recently become an apprentice.

In the beginning Tanechka submitted to her abuse in silence. In the end she revolted, and, addressing her assailant, said quite calmly and affably, so that everyone laughed, "Alexandra Ivanovna, you are a dog!"

Alexandra Ivanovna scowled. "You are a dog yourself!" she exclaimed.

Tanechka was sitting sewing. She paused now and then from her work and said, calmly and deliberately, "You always whine . . . you certainly are a dog. . . . You have a dog's snout . . . And a dog's ears . . . And a wagging tail . . . The mistress will soon drive you out of doors, because you are the most detestable of dogs—a poodle."

Tanechka was a young, plump, rosy-cheeked girl with a good-natured face which revealed a trace of cunning. She sat there demurely, barefooted, still dressed in her apprentice clothes; her eyes were clear, and her brows were highly arched on her finely curved white forehead, framed by straight dark chestnut hair, which looked black in the distance. Tanechka's voice was clear, even, sweet, insinuating, and if one could have

heard its sound only, and not given heed to the words, it would have given the impression that she was paying Alexandra Ivanovna compliments.

The other seamstresses laughed, the apprentices chuckled, they covered their faces with their black aprons and cast side glances at Alexandra Ivanovna, who was livid with rage.

"Wretch!" she exclaimed. "I will pull your ears for you! I won't leave a hair on your head!"

Tanechka replied in a gentle voice: "The paws are a bit short . . . The poodle bites as well as barks . . . It may be necessary to buy a muzzle."

Alexandra Ivanovna made a movement toward Tanechka, but before Tanechka had time to lay aside her work and get up, the mistress of the establishment entered.

"Alexandra Ivanovna," she said sternly, "what do you mean by making such a fuss?"

Alexandra Ivanovna, much agitated, replied, "Irina Petrovna, I wish you would forbid her to call me a dog!"

Tanechka in her turn complained: "She is always snarling at something or other."

But the mistress looked at her sternly and said, "Tanechka, I can see through you. Are you sure you didn't begin it? You needn't think that because you are a seamstress now you are an important person. If it weren't for your mother's sake—"

Tanechka grew red, but preserved her innocent and affable manner. She addressed her mistress in a subdued voice: "Forgive me, Irina Petrovna, I will not do it again. But it wasn't altogether my fault . . ."

Alexandra Ivanovna returned home almost ill with rage. Tanechka had guessed her weakness.

"A dog! Well, then, I am a dog," thought Alexandra Ivanovna, "but it is none of her affair! Have I looked to see whether she is a serpent or a fox? It is easy to find one out, but why make a fuss about it? Is a dog worse than any other animal?"

The clear summer night languished and sighed. A soft breeze from the adjacent fields occasionally blew down the peaceful streets. The moon rose clear and full, that very same moon which rose long ago at another place, over the broad desolate steppe, the home of the wild, of those who ran free and whined in their ancient earthly travail.

And now, as then, glowed eyes sick with longing; and her heart, still

wild, not forgetting in town the great spaciousness of the steppe, felt oppressed; her throat was troubled with a tormenting desire to howl.

She was about to undress, but what was the use? She could not sleep, anyway. She went into the passage. The planks of the floor bent and creaked under her, and small shavings and sand which covered them tickled her feet not unpleasantly.

She went out on the doorstep. There sat the *babushka* Stepanida, a black figure in her black shawl, gaunt and shriveled. She sat with her head bent, and seemed to be warming herself in the rays of the cold moon.

Alexandra Ivanovna sat down beside her. She kept looking at the old woman sideways. The large curved nose of her companion seemed to her like the beak of an old bird. "A crow?" Alexandra Ivanovna asked herself.

She smiled, forgetting for the moment her longing and her fears. Shrewd as the eyes of a dog, her own eyes lighted up with the joy of her discovery. In the pale green light of the moon the wrinkles of her faded face became altogether invisible, and she seemed once more young and merry and light-hearted, just as she was ten years ago, when the moon had not yet called upon her to bark and bay of nights before the windows of the dark bathhouse.

She moved closer to the old woman, and said affably, "*Babushka* Stepanida, there is something I have been wanting to ask you."

The old woman turned to her, her dark face furrowed with wrinkles, and asked in a sharp, oldish voice that sounded like a caw, "Well, my dear? Go ahead and ask."

Alexandra Ivanovna gave a repressed laugh; her thin shoulders suddenly trembled from a chill that ran down her spine. She spoke very quietly: "*Babushka* Stepanida, it seems to me—tell me is it true?—I don't know exactly how to put it—but you, *babushka*, please don't take offense—it is not from malice that I—"

"Go on my dear, say it," said the old woman, looking at Alexandra Ivanovna with glowing eyes.

"It seems to be, *babushka*—please, now, don't take offense—as if you, *babushka*, were a crow."

The old woman turned away. She nodded her head, and seemed like one who had recalled something. Her head, with its sharply outlined nose, bowed and nodded, and at last it seemed to Alexandra Ivanovna that the old woman was dozing. Dozing, and mumbling something under her nose—nodding and mumbling old forgotten words, old magic words.

An intense quiet reigned out of doors: It was neither light nor dark, and everything seemed bewitched with the inarticulate mumbling of old, forgotten words. Everything languished and seemed lost in apathy.

Again a longing oppressed her heart. And it was neither a dream nor an illusion. A thousand perfumes, imperceptible by day, became subtly distinguishable, and they recalled something ancient and primitive.

In a barely audible voice the old woman mumbled, "Yes, I am a crow; only I have no wings. But there are times when I caw, and I caw, and tell of wo. And I am given to forebodings, my dear; each time I have one I simply must caw. People are not particularly anxious to hear me. And when I see a doomed person I have such a strong desire to caw."

The old woman suddenly made a sweeping movement with her arms, and in a shrill voice cried out twice: "Kar-r, Kar-r!"

Alexandra Ivanovna shuddered, and asked, "*Babushka*, at whom are you cawing?"

"At you, my dear," the old woman answered. "I am cawing at you."

It had become too painful to sit with the old woman any longer. Alexandra Ivanovna went to her own room. She sat down before the open window and listened to two voices at the gate.

"It simply won't stop whining!" said a low and harsh voice.

"And uncle, did you see?" asked an agreeable young tenor.

Alexandra Ivanovna recognized in this last the voice of the curly-headed, freckled-faced lad who lived in the same court.

A brief and depressing silence followed. Then she heard a hoarse and harsh voice say suddenly. "Yes. I saw. It's very large—and white. It lies near the bathhouse, and bays at the moon."

The voice gave her an image of the man, of his shovel-shaped beard, his low, furrowed forehead, his small, piggy eyes, and his spread-out fat legs.

It's a constant war to try to get MAGAZINE OF HORROR, STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES, FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION, and WORLD WIDE ADVENTURE on to your newsstands—and then keep them appearing there issue after issue. We win on one front, and are pushed back on another.

If you're in an area where we've suffered reverses, so that you don't see us, there is a simple remedy; you'll find it on pages 125 and 128 of this issue.

"And why does it bay, uncle?" asked the agreeable voice.

And again the hoarse voice did not reply at once.

"Certainly to no good purpose—and where it came from is more than I can say."

"Do you think, uncle, it may be a werewolf?" asked the agreeable voice.

"I should not advise you to investigate," replied the hoarse voice.

She could not quite understand what these words implied, nor did she wish to think of them. She did not feel inclined to listen further. What was the sound and significance of human words to her?

The moon looked straight into her face and persistently called her and tormented her. Her heart was restless with a dark longing, and she could not sit still.

Alexandra Ivanovna quickly undressed herself. Naked, all white, she silently stole through the passage: she then opened the outer door (there was no one on the step or outside) and ran quickly across the court and the vegetable garden, and reached the bathhouse. The sharp contact of her body with the cold air and her feet with the cold ground gave her pleasure. But soon her body was warm.

She lay down in the grass, on her stomach. Then, raising herself on her elbows, she lifted her face toward the pale, brooding moon, and gave a long-drawn-out whine.

"Listen, uncle, it is whining," said the curly-haired lad at the gate.

The agreeable tenor voice trembled perceptibly.

"Whining again, the accursed one!" said the hoarse, harsh voice slowly.

They rose from the bench. The gate latch clicked.

They went silently across the courtyard and the vegetable garden, the two of them. The older man, black-bearded and powerful, walked in front, a gun in his hand. The curly-headed lad followed tremblingly, and looked constantly behind.

Near the bathhouse, in the grass, lay a huge white dog, whining piteously. Its head, black on the crown, was raised to the moon, which pursued its way in the cold sky; its hind legs were strangely thrown backward, while the front ones, firm and straight, pressed hard against the ground.

In the pale green and unreal light of the moon it seemed enormous. So huge a dog was surely never seen on earth. It was thick and fat. The black spot, which began at the head and stretched in uneven strands down the entire spine, seemed like a woman's loosened hair. No

tail was visible; presumably it was turned under. The fur on the body was so short that in the distance the dog seemed wholly naked, and its hide shone dimly in the moonlight, so that altogether it resembled the body of a nude woman, who lay in the grass and bayed at the moon.

The man with the black beard took aim. The curly-haired lad crossed himself and mumbled something.

The discharge of a rifle sounded in the night air. The dog gave a groan, jumped up on its hind legs, became a naked woman, who, her body covered with blood, started to run, all the while groaning, weeping, and raising cries of distress.

The black-bearded one and the curly-haired one threw themselves in the grass, and began to moan in wild terror.

Flight

(continued from page 105)

"Of course—" His voice broke off, for there was a stir in the mist at my left.

I knew that my elder brother had returned, and was glad. But, my joy was only brief. His voice came firmly: "We have overstayed our time. We must both leave you."

"No!" I cried vehemently. "I have come this far! I will follow you—on and on!"

"That is impossible," my elder brother went on. "You have many good deeds to perform. Such are the materials for your palace. Stone by stone, you must build it, for even we—much as we love you—can not do that. It will be one of that number which you saw, across the stream and the meadows."

"But I want no palace!" I shouted in panic. "I ask no more than to be with you now!"

I reached frantically forward and sought the hand of each. They did not object but gently returned my frenzied pressure. . . . For an instant the mist lifted. I saw their faces smiling at me . . .

Again the mist lowered. My hands, although warm and tingling, were empty. Then, into the swirling grayness, a light began to penetrate. From a tiny pin-point of color it enlarged. I recognized it—my whale-oil lamp.

And, on the table before me, still lay the telegram announcing the accidental death of my two brothers.

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It Is Written...

It has been gratifying to see that all but one or two of you, the readers, who have sent in your ballots on issues containing serials have voted on the installment at hand, rather than waiting to read all the parts at once. Our most worthy competitor *ANALOG* (with whom we're really not much in competition, actually), has a serial installment in nearly every issue; and Mr. Campbell's department, *The Analytical Laboratory*, indicates that most of his readers find no difficulty in rating any current installment in relation to the complete stories in the particular issue. And, really, unless you are unwilling to read a continued story until you have all the parts on hand, there is no reason why you should not find any particular installment more or less commending than other stories in the issue, and no reason why you should not say so.

Sometimes a decided majority will find a particular installment "best in the issue", but this does not mean that the next part will also come out in first place; nor again does it mean that the serial as a whole is not so good if part one tops the issue, but a subsequent installment does not. And sometimes it works the other way. As this is being typed (toward the end of August) I am in the process of catching up with back issues of *ANALOG*, long neglected, and am now following the late H. Beam Pi-

per's novel, *Space Viking*. The first part came out third place in the reader's choice for the issue, and I can easily see why. It aroused and held my interest, but not overwhelmingly so; two of the complete stories in that issue easily topped it. Part two, which I am now reading, is decidedly stronger; and though I am only a few chapters into it, I can guess why this came out in first place, even though I haven't as yet gotten to the rest of the issue; now the slow buildup is beginning to pay off. I do not know whether I'll agree with the readers' decision after I've finished the entire issue, but I can see grounds for their having felt that way.

Back in the days from which most of our material in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* is drawn, it was a very rare thing for a serial to take first place with each and every installment. Part of the reason for this, of course, is that only one of the magazines (*WEIRD TALES*) tabulated and reported to the readers on the results of their collective opinions. The first serial wherein each and every installment came out first place was *The Solitary Hunters*, by Dr. David H. Keller (January, February, March 1934). Both before and after, various installments of serials were voted first place by the majority.

There have been requests for a reprint of *The Solitary Hunters*, and

all I can say right now is that I'll certainly consider it. Running serials is still an experimental matter, and more evidence must be collected before we decide on this.

It is no happier thing for an editor to have to say "no" to a request by a small minority of the readers than it is for a humane and conscientious commander to send his forces in to a position or situation where he knows that very few have any chance at all of coming back. Over 90% of the vote on the matter of reprinting *The Devil's Bride* was in favor, and nearly all enthusiastically in favor. The opposition was nearly split down the middle; almost half of the few who said "No, please don't!" were doubtful of running a three-part serial in MOH, while the rest detest Jules de Grandin, or have a low opinion of Mr. Quinn's writing in general—although one praised his other stories.

After kind words about our editorial on H.P. Lovecraft in the November MOH, *August Derleth of Arkham House* continues: "We do intend to keep the three volumes of HPL'S stories in print—indeed, a second printing (3000 copies) of *At The Mountains of Madness* was delivered just last month, following a similar reprinting of *The Dunwich Horror & C*, last year; and we'll be forced to reprint *Dagon & C* next year."

The three volumes referred to contain all the Lovecraft fiction, as well as a chronological listing of the stories in the first title mentioned, a very fine biographical essay on HPL by Derleth in the second, and

HPL's excellent study, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* in the third. They are uniform in size, attractive, and the print is easily readable.

Daniel F. Cole, writes from Alberta Canada to vote against de Grandin, deploring the author's efforts spent upon him, and goes on to say:

"Arthur Conan Doyle is another case in point. Think how much richer the literary world would have been with the historical and science-fictional novels Doyle could have written in place of his Sherlock Holmes series. Sure, Sherlock Holmes is harmless entertainment, but think of all the superior literature it (the Holmes series) prevented from being written. The mind boggles.

"Psychical detectives are a dime a dozen. You have Hodgson's Carnacki; Blackwood's John Silence; Rohmer's Nayland Smith; etc., etc. And at the bottom of the heap is Quinn's Jules de Grandin—a very cheap imitation of the others. Please, I don't mind the odd story by Quinn, but please, pretty please—not a whole novel. Why waste so much space on your magazine on trash like this when you could be reprinting (among other things) Keller's *The Devil and the Doctor*; Olaf Stapledon's *The Last Men in London*; and *Darkness and the Light*; John Taine's *The Forbidden Garden*, GOG 660, *The Crystal Horde*, etc.—that is, if you insist upon serializing novels.

"Perhaps the best of the psychical detectives in John Silence, and even though this is so, you'll find that this is not the best of Blackwood's writing. In fact, in most cases, the

psychical detective part of an author's writing represents his worst writing. Look at Rohmer's Fu Man-chu and compare the hacky, repetitive plots and writing with his better novels, such as *Brood of the Witch Queen*, etc. Compare Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series to his Professor Challenger series, or Blackwood's John Silence stories to his masterpieces, *The Willows*, *The Listeners*, etc.

"What I am saying is that series, generally speaking, are very poor. You read one story in the series and you've read them all . . .

"It seems to me that for one who speaks so much of high standards, your magazine should have better standards than it does. You would do well to look at your own magazine before criticising others. Practice what you preach."

Perhaps you can point out to me, Friend Cole, when and where I have criticised other magazines in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, or again where I have "preached high standards"; I do not recall having done either in the pages of MOH.

What I have done, as well as I could, has been to note the existence of such things as standards, and to insist that there is nothing wrong with enjoying fiction that is little more than entertainment, but that it is well to be aware of the level of what one is enjoying. Otherwise, one runs the risk of equating Sherlock Holmes with Shakespeare—a trap that the best Sherlockians avoid, since they realize that the core of the fun lies in the realization that it is fun, and not in deadly earnest.

There's little doubt that Conan Doyle himself would have agreed with you that his historical novels were superior to his tales of Sherlock Holmes, and it may be that he preferred Professor Challenger to Holmes, too. Just this morning (Sept. 11 '68), I slipped a paper-bound copy of *The Lost World* into my jacket pocket for re-reading on the train of mornings and evenings. The first chapter and a half, revisited, confirms my original impression: satisfactory; and I expect to re-read the other Challenger stories, as well as those which I haven't read as yet—providing, of course, that I can find a copy of *The Land of Mist*, which does not seem to be in paperback.

For if we are going to stand upon Sir Arthur's own judgment of his best and most valuable work, we must read *The Land of Mist*, and the other Spiritualist writings, both those which he wrote as fiction and those which he believed to be fact. This was later in his life of course, for he had hopefully flung Holmes over Reichenbach Falls much earlier, so that he could get back to historical fiction. As to the relative merits of these and Holmes and Challenger, I'll have to sit the argument out until I've read at least some of the historical novels; but while I enjoy Professor Challenger, I did not find him so memorable as Holmes and Watson. And had the reading public at the time, which responded so enthusiastically to Holmes and Watson, found Professor Challenger as engrossing, then Doyle would surely have written more about Challenger—until he grew tired of this character, too.

While I haven't read all the Fu Manchu series, I can see a difference between those I have read and such novels as *Brood of the Witch Queen*, *The Bat Flies Low*, and *The Day the World Ended*. But here we'll have to agree to disagree, for the difference seems to me mostly in background, and very little in plot or characters. Morris Klaw, not Nayland Smith, is Rohmer's psychical detective; and looking at the series from the "when you read one, you've read them all" viewpoint, Klaw isn't vastly different from the others, although I'd name Chesterton, Blackwood, and Hodgson as the best writers of the lot, and considerably above the next best.

But I'd suggest that the sensible way to look at a series (and thus account for its popularity, even among some readers with a wide range of tastes) is that the entire question of whether the detective character will survive and solve the mystery is irrelevant. We know he will—unless the author grows weary of him, and tries to do him in, as Doyle did. What we want to know is *how*. The best series, of course; are those where the detective and his faithful colleague grow and change slightly with the passing of time, and during the course of their adventures we find out more and more about

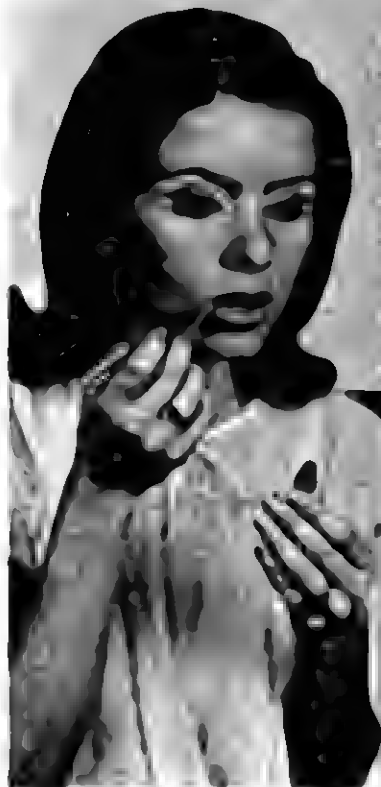
them. That is why, for me, despite for better writing on the part of Blackwood and Hodgson, and often superior imagination in both the Carnacki and John Silence mysteries and their solution, Holmes/Watson remain my favorites. And I suspect it is the ingenuity of both the problems and the solution of them that accounts for a great deal of the popularity de Grandin and Trowbridge, for (as I've said before) the over-all weakness is that they change so little over the course of 25 years, and Dr. Trowbridge's capacity for learning nothing from experience is truly awesome. But that is only when you *compare* this story—whatever this one is—with the others; on its own terms in any individual story the weakness is much less important.

The person who just cannot respond with pleasure to de Grandin and Trowbridge (and there is no reason why any particular person either should or should not in any obligatory sense) will see very little but the weaknesses; and none of us appreciate repetition of that which we detest. On the other hand, there is good reason for not assuming that a series is worthless because one does not enjoy it, or proclaiming a novel that one has not read to be trash.

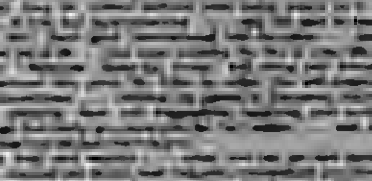
(Turn to page 118)

ADMONITORY NOTE: Today, I received a very sad letter from a reader of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* who wanted, and intended, to obtain a complete set of back issues. He had not sent in for the first issue—and then one day saw that it is out of print. This can happen to you, too!

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Tuesday the 28th. Just before sunrise, while I was yet asleep, Mr. Christian, with the master at arms, gunner's mate, and Thomas Burkitt, seaman, came into my cabin, and seizing me, tied my hands with a cord behind my back, threatening me with instant death, if I spoke or made the least noise: I, however, called as loud as I could, in hopes of assistance; but they had already secured the officers who were not of their part, by placing sentinels at their doors. There were three men at my cabin door, besides the four within; Christian had only a cutlass in his hand, the others had muskets and bayonets. I was hauled out of bed, and forced on deck in my shirt, suffering great pain, from the tightness with which they had tied my hands. I demanded the reason for such violence, but received no other answer than abuse, for not holding my tongue. The master, the gunner, the surgeon, Mr. Elphinstone, master's mate, and Nelson, were kept confined below . . .

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A MUTINY ABOARD THE SHIP

by Lt. William Bligh

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you, see page 125.*

Don Norris writes from Pasadena, California: "I think you are doing a fantastic job with *MAGAZINE OF HORROR, STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* and *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION*. Not only a job, but you (like Mr. Derleth) are rendering a service to those of us interested in these areas of fiction. Many stories I have looked for elsewhere and failed to find have appeared in *MOH*. But I also like to see new stories appear in the issues and I think that there is a chance of discovering another HPL or some such by doing this. I extremely enjoy *The Editor's Page, Inquisitions*, and *It Is Written*. Keep them.

"Getting down to issue number 23, I would have to say I thought *Leapers* was the best. I didn't have access to the original version, so naturally I can't say if the newer version is better. Despite some loopholes in the way it was written, it is very refreshing and an interesting approach to the Mythos. Though at first I thought the ending was rushed, I later decided that its ending was natural for the style in which it was told. Grayson wasn't going to write reams and reams at that stage in the events.

"Next I liked *The Abyss*. The plot was very interesting and creative, and the story was well written. Third: *One by One*—interesting ideas. Fourth: *The Thirteenth Floor*—cornball, but it had some weirdness and horror in it. Lastly comes *The Death Mask*. The primary idea of the handkerchief was good bit the author never expanded on it; again cornball. The cover again displayed Finlay's genius with pen and ink. Hypnotic

and weird, it blended very well with that striking purple."

David Charles Paskow, who rated part one of *The Abyss* outstanding, continues: "It is good to see David H. Keller being kept in print. There are those writers who are 'discovered' only after their death; Dr. Keller received the recognition due him while he was alive, and it is a fitting memorial to a writer of his ability that his deserved fame and, in a way, he himself, is kept alive by the re-printing of his stories. Though I prefer his science fiction, his ability to tell a story was never limited by type.

"I recently purchased *The Phantom Fighter* from Arkham House. This was my first purchase from them, and I was pleasantly surprised at the quality packaging of Quinn's de Grandin stories. I recommend this book to all MOH and SMS readers."

There is no doubt of the impact that the first part of *The Abyss* had upon you, the readers: while most of the votes came via the preference pages, without comment, those "out-standing" and "first place" designations for Dr. Keller spoke eloquently. There was never a time during the voting where any other story in the issue came close to tying with the lead story, let alone running ahead; all considered, I feel pleased that my own story was enjoyed widely enough to give it a clear second place, in the end—for it was not second all the way.

Hugo Blanco, Jr., writes: "Since I know that L. Sprague de Camp reads MOH (I read his letter in an

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issue of MOH), I'd like to ask him why does he, in the introductions to several of the Lancer 'Confan' volumes, state that *WEIRD TALES* was a 'magazine that carried, mixed with a lot of ephemeral trash, ...'

"I'm not criticising his opinion; I just want to know why he says this."

I'll let Sprague speak for himself, noting only that the Farnsworth Wright *WEIRD TALES*, taken as a whole, presented an exceptionally wide range of material; while the subsequent editorship gradually lopped off the extremes at both the ends of excellence and awfulness.

Several readers, in addition to Mr. Cole, have spoken of Dr. Keller's book, *The Devil and the Doctor*, suggesting that we consider it for reprint. Having re-read it only last Winter (1967/68), my original opinion of its charm was confirmed—but there are two difficulties with running it in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*: (1) it is an easy-going story where the main suspense does not lie in weird events, which are rather mild, but in character development and ideas, and I have grave doubts that it would break up into installments well (2) still more important, it is very long—longer, I would say than *The Devil's Bride*, and close to double the length of *The Abyss*. I really believe we would need a monthly publication in order to handle it, and that is not a visible possibility at the moment. This second difficulty also applies to the other novels that Mr. Cole listed, and all of them which I have read are clear science fiction, not science fiction horror.

Coming Next Issue

I called aloud, shouting my friend's name. The empty rooms only echoed my own outcry. And then—I say this with no attempt to be dramatic—an unutterable fear came over me.

For a moment I stood there in the hall, undecided whether to turn and run or to advance farther. The living darkness was in my eyes, in my throat, vibrant with its high-pitched *whirring* sound and hideous with a stench of fetid decay. It hung here, in the corridor of Pedersen's home, a thousand times more ugly than in the street outside. It was stalking me.

Then I found false courage. Resolved to find my friend, or at least discover where he had gone, I crept forward. I say "crept"—it was creeping, nothing more. With both hands outflung before me as a barrier of defense, I went slowly down the hall. Somehow in the dark I found the door of Pedersen's library, the room where he spent most of his time. Never in all the years I had known Pedersen, had he gone off and left the door of his most private sanctum open.

Here I struck a match. The sulfur sputtered a suddenly flared bright; and I shrank from the threshold with a gurgling cry. I saw that scene for only an instant; yet as I write this account three weeks later, it is still vivid and frightful. Before me lay the narrow, book-lined room with its single table. A huge carved chair stood by the table; and in that chair, staring straight toward me, sat Pedersen.

When I say that the man's face was a mask of unspeakable horror, I mean just that. I have seen torment before, where torment is a routine thing. I have handled crushed, broken bodies on the operating table; I have watched men and women die slow deaths when the more merciful thing would have been a bullet. But Pedersen's face, when I looked into it at that moment, was the essence of all agony. The eyes protruded like sticks of charcoal; the tongue was a black, bloated lolling horror. And the body below that was no body at all, but a shapeless, bloody mass of sodden pulp, propped there in mockery.

Don't miss this tale of blackness that rolled up like a thick fog, as a Thing from outer darkness feasted . . .

SPAWN OF INFERNO

by Hugh B. Cave

COMING SOON

THE PHANTOM DRUG

by A. W. Kapfer

Have You Missed These Issues?

#1, August 1963: Out of print.

#2, November 1963: *The Space-Eaters*, Frank Belknap Long; *The Faceless Thing*, Edward D. Hoch; *The Red Room*, H.G. Wells; *Hungary's Female Vampire* (article), Dean Lipton; *A Tough Tussle*, Ambrose Bierce; *Doorslummer*, Donald A. Wollheim; *The Electric Chain*, George Waight; *The Other One*, Jerryl L. Keane; *The Chamber*, Archie Binns; *Clarissa*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes*, Rudyard Kipling.

#3, February 1964: Out of print.

#4, May 1964: Out of print.

#5, September 1964: *Cassius*, Henry S. Whitehead; *Love at First Sight*, J. L. Miller; *Five-Year Contract*, by J. Vernon Shea; *The House of the Worm*, Merle Prout; *The Beautiful Suit*, H.G. Wells; *A Stranger Came to Reap*, Stephen Dentinger; *The Morning the Birds Forgot to Sing*, Walt Liebscher; *Bones*, Donald A. Wollheim; *The Ghostly Rental*, Henry James.

#6, November 1964: *Caveins of Horror*, Laurence Manning; *Prodigy*, Walt Liebscher; *The Mask*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Life-After-Death of Mr. Thaddeus Warde*, Robert Barbour Johnson; *The Feminine Fraction*, David Grinnell; *Dr. Heddiger's Experiment*, Nathaniel Hawthorne; *The Pacer*, August Derleth; *The Moth*, H. G. Wells; *The Door to Saturn*, Clark Ashton Smith.

Order From Page 128

Liam McGhee writes: "I like the opportunity you give your readers to evaluate the stories in MOH. This personal touch seems quite rare in our modern times. It also gives an additional zest to the reading of the stories themselves, which I thought were very good, by the way.

"... I suppose it wasn't politic of me to rate the editor's story in a tie for third place, but I could figure no other way to express my opinion in the tally. I thought *Leapers* was a fascinating story, especially the underlying concept of full moon-leaping, and the portions concerning the artist and his paintings, but there was something in the continuity that shattered my attention. Maybe too many dissolves and quotes from news items or something...

"*The Abyss* is a grand story and will look forward to the second part. I don't think it's a perfect story, but it is undoubtedly a real 'original' and consonant with the writer's personality, as you so entertainingly described it in the early pages of the magazine. The idea of the primal power of woman is one I have never seen explored in this genre, though I have given it considerable thought in the mythological range, as with the English writers Robert Graves and Mary Renault.

"I liked *The Death Mask*, too; it is one of those stories which linger in your mind, a pleasant-unpleasant hangover. And contrary to one of your reader's opinions in the September issue, I like the well done short-short story. It is compact and expressive and hits you fast. It may be no good for a 'creeping horror' impression, but in this case, with

that damned handkerchief with the cabalistic symbols on the corners forming the face, the fast unpleasant impression was very well done. I liked the element of pity for the unfortunate widower in this one, it gave dimension to the sense of horror . . . "

Perhaps one reason why there was a taboo, for a time, against an editor's running his own stories in the magazine (or at least using his own name) was the assumption that readers would be reluctant to say so if they thought the stories were poor; or that would-be writers would praise them as extravagantly as hypocritically.

Another reader thinks it's too bad that I put *Leapers* into the same issue as part one of *The Abyss*; it should, this reader thought, have been an easy winner over the usual run of stories in competition. Perhaps—but an easy win is exactly what I'm not interested in, when it comes to presenting my own efforts for your approval or censure! My policy is to make sure that there is at least one other story in the issue which I personally consider equal, if not superior, to my own. Due to the length of the first installment of *The Abyss*, I could not run as wide a variety of competing stories as I might have liked to have done—although I expected Dr. Keller to be a winner from the very first ballot, as was the case. However, I also expected some competition among the stories, and did indeed receive it. Cornball or not. *The Thirteenth Floor* has emotional impact, and my expectation of its pressing my own offering hard, and leaving me in

COMING SOON

THE HORROR OUT OF LOVECRAFT

by Donald A. Wollheim

Have You Missed These Issues?

7, January 1965: *The Thing from—Outside*, George Allan England; *Black Thing at Midnight*, Joseph Payne Brennan; *The Oblong Box*, Edgar Allan Poe; *A Way with Kids*, Ed M. Clinton; *The Devil of the Marsh*, E.B. Marriott—Watson; *The Shuttered Room*, H.P. Lovecraft & August Derleth.

8, April 1965: *The Black Laugh*, William J. Makin; *The Hand of Glory*, R.H.D. Barham; *The Garrison*, David Grinnell; *Passeur*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Lady of the Velvet Collar*, Washington Irving; *Jack*, Reynold Junker; *The Burglar-Proof Vault*, Oliver Taylor; *The Dead Who Walk*, Ray Cummings;

#9, June 1965: *The Night Wire*, H.F. Arnold; *Sacrilege*, Wallace West; *All the Stain of Long Delight*, Jerome Clark; *Skulls in the Stars*, Robert E. Howard; *The Photographs*, Richard Marsh; *The Distortion out of Space*, Francis Flagg; *Guarantee Period*, William M. Danner; *The Door in the Wall*, H.G. Wells; *The Three Low Masses*, Alphonse Daudet; *The Whistling Room*, William Hope Hodgson.

#10, August 1965: *The Girl at Heddon's*, Pauline Kappel Priluck; *The Torture of Hope*, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam; *The Cloth of Madness*, Seabury Quinn; *The Tree*, Gerald W. Page; *In the Court of the Dragon*, Robert W. Chambers; *Placide's Wife*, Kirk Mashburn; *Come Closer*, Joanna Russ; *The Plague of the Living Dead*, A. Hyatt Verrill.

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COMING SOON

THE RED SAIL

by Charles H. Craig

Have You Missed These Issues?

#11, November 1965: *The Empty Zoo*, Edward D. Hoch; *A Psychological Shipwreck*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Call of the Mech-Men*, Laurence Manning; *Was it a Dream*, Guy de Maupassant; *Under the Hawth Tree*, Katherine Yates; *The Head of Du Bois*, Dorothy Norman Cooke; *The Dweller in Dark Valley* (verse), Robert E. Howard; *The Devil's Pool*, Grege la Spina.

#12, Winter 1965/66: *The Faceless God*, Robert Bloch; *Master Nicholas*, Seabury Quinn; *But not the Herald*, Roger Zelazny; *Dr. Munching, Exorcist*, Gordon MacCreagh; *The Affair at 7 Rue de M.*, John Steinbeck; *The Man in the Dark*, Irwin Ross; *The Abyss*, Robert A.W. Lowndes; *Destination* (verse), Robert E. Howard; *Memories of HPL* (article), Muriel E. Eddy; *The Black Beast*, Henry S. Whitehead.

#13, Summer 1966: *The Thing in the House*, H. F. Scotten; *Divine Madness*, Roger Zelazny; *Valley of the Lost*, Robert E. Howard; *Hereditry*, David H. Keller; *Dwelling of the Righteous*, Anna Hunger; *Almost Immortal*, Austin Hall.

#14, Winter 1966/67: *Out of print.*

#15, Spring 1967: *The Room of Shadows*, Arthur J. Burks; *Lilies*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Flaw*, J. Vernon Shea; *The Doom of London*, Robert Barr; *The Vale of Lost Women*, Robert E. Howard; *The Ghoul Gallery*, Hugh B. Cave.

suspense at times as to whether *Leapers* would come out in second place, was also realized. Not that a sure bet isn't satisfying at times—but not in this frame of reference, to me.

George H. Wagner, Jr. writes: "The November MOH is indeed a choice issue! The Lovecraft pieces are exquisite (even though I already had all but one of them), though some younger fans fond of crude 'action' may not yet fully appreciate their Dunsanian atmosphere. These pieces fully prove that as a literary stylist, Lovecraft belongs among the great masters of Twentieth Century literature—right along with Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Wolfe, and William Faulkner.

"Were it not for the Lovecraft pieces, my vote for best-in-the-issue would go to Frances Bragg Middleton's *Once in a Thousand Years*. While not the best story ever written on the subject of the 'Isles of the Blest', it is exceptionally charming.

"Steffan B. Aletti's *The Eye of Horus* is not as good as his *The Castle in the Window*, but both show exceptional promise. I would suggest that Mr. Aletti study deeply such stylistic models as Lovecraft, Machen, Walter de la Mare, and the Egyptology-oriented horror stories of Robert Bloch.

"Lovecraft, by the way, was not a true recluse. The true recluse rarely does anything constructive—such as writing good, original fiction. The true recluse does hoard things—from old cameras to last-year's telephone books. Lovecraft was not a hoarder, and was creative—in short, the very opposite of the recluse. Recluses rarely carry on great and lasting



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Have You Missed These Issues?

#16, Summer 1967: *Night and Silence*, Maurice Level; *Lazarus*, Leonid Andreyev; *Mr. Oatbur*, Joseph Payne Brennan; *The Dog That Laughed*, Charles Willard Duffin; *Ah, Sweet Youth*, Pauline Kappel Prikluck; *The Man Who Never Was*, R. A. Lafferty; *The Leaden Ring*, S. Baring-Gould; *The Monster of the Prophecy*, Clark Ashton Smith.

#17, Fall 1967: *A Sense of Crawling*, Robert Edmond Aber; *The Laughing-Diaks*, Wallace West; *Dermot's Ban*, Robert E. Howard; *The Spell of the Sword*, Frank Aubrey; "Williamson", Henry S. Whitehead; *The Curse Of Amen-Ra*, Victor Williamson.

#18, November 1967: *In Amundsen's Tent*, John Martin Leaby; *Transient and Immortal*, Jim Haught; *Out of the Deep*, Robert E. Howard; *The Bibliophile*, Thomas Boyd; *The Ultimate Creature*, R. A. Lafferty; *Wolves of Darkness*, Jack Williamson.

#19, January 1968: *The Red Witch*, Nictzin Dyalhis; *The Last Letter From Norman Underwood*, Larry Eugene Meredith; *The Jewels of Vishnu*, Harriet Bennett; *The Man From Cincinnati*, Holloway Horn; *Ground Afire*, Anna Hunger; *The Wind In The Rose-Bush*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *The Last of Placide's Wife*, Kirk Mashburn; *The Years are as a Knife*, (verse) Robert E. Howard.

#20, March 1968: *The Siren of the Snakes*, Arlton Eadie; *The Rack*, G. G. Ketcham; *A Cry From Beyond*, Victor Rousseau; *Only Gone Before*, Emil Petaja; *The Voice*, Nell Kay; *The Monsters*, Murray Leinster.

correspondence with anyone. They may intend to, but due to the tremendous strains under which the recluse is put in order to sublimate his sexual drives into collecting junk, he rarely has the time or energy for human contacts, even through correspondence.

"Lovecraft did have mental problems, however, and it seems to me that they were probably severe ones. The Oedipal relationship under which he labored during his early life seems one of the most extreme to be encountered anywhere in literary biography. It comes out in many stories, and in even more of the letters. We have *The Dunwich Horror*, in which a misshapen albino (Lovecraft's mother is reported to have 'pinched' arsenic to make her skin white) bears an even more hideous son. The father is Yog-Sothoth, a primal 'father figure' who probably represents among other things Lovecraft's paretic father. This same guilt is represented by the 'monster' in *The Outsider*, and especially in *The Rats in the Walls*, where the narrator is afraid that the madness of his ancestors (referring to Lovecraft's parents' mental disorders) will infect him. Lovecraft's own fear of his own (to him) 'tainted' ancestry can be found in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, *The Lurking Fear*, and *The Festival*, among other stories. In *Arthur Jermyn*, the hero 'soaked himself in oil and set fire to his clothing one night' because he discovered that he was descended from a white (albino? arsenic?) ape; the clincher here is that the narrator of this tale writes that 'if we knew what we are, we should do as Sir Arthur Jermyn did.'

"Lovecraft probably recognized most of this. He certainly read Freud, and probably had conferences with the alienists of the hospital where his mother was a patient. However, he doubtless rejected this whole analysis—for in *Beyond the Wall of Sleep*, Lovecraft speaks of the 'puerile symbolism' of Freud."

Psychopathological studies of authors, and of the meaning of their individual symbolologies, as well as their use of symbols which seem to have very widespread general meanings, have its interest and fascination, I'll agree, but I have no patience at all with substituting them for evaluation of the literary worth or impact of their stories, or again for substituting a study of H.P. Lovecraft's personal problems, emotional or otherwise, for simply reading and enjoying his fiction.

The fact is that either you or I respond pleurably to HPL (or any other author) or we do not. Some of the reasons for this may indeed lie in the realm of psychopathology, but science is not art nor is art science. (And psychopathology is hardly an exact science; the many "schools" sharply disagree with each other on various counts which each proclaims to be fundamental, for one thing.)

I find some of such studies interesting, but cannot escape the feeling that if the various literary geniuses dissected by the late Dr. Edmund Bergler, for example, could have been "cured" according to Bergler's standards of "health", we wouldn't have had any masterpieces from them at all.

Have You Missed These Issues?

#21, May 1968: *Kings of the Night*, Robert E. Howard; *The Cunning of Private Rogoff*, David A. English; *The Bruin-Eaters*, Frank Belknap Long; *A Psychical Invasion* (part one), Algernon Blackwood; *Nasturtia*, Col. S. P. Meek; *The Dark Star*, G. G. Pendarves.

#22, July 1968: *Worms of the Earth*, Robert E. Howard; *Come, Anna Hunger*; *They Called Him Ghost*, Laurence J. Cahill; *The Phantom Rickshaw*, Rudyard Kipling; *The Castle in the Window*, Stefan B. Aletti; *A Psychical Invasion*, (part two), Algernon Blackwood.

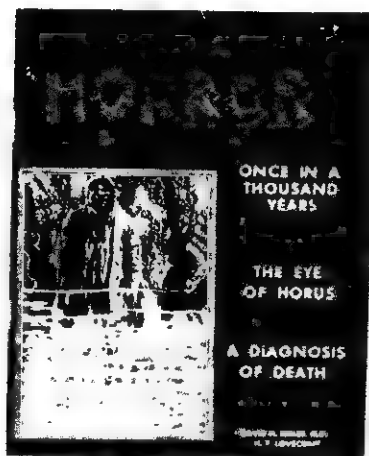
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